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Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

C. Wesley Owens

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2020

Abstract

Elementary Content Teacher Perceptions Regarding Their ELL Instructional Practices

by

C. Wesley Owens

MA, American University, 1985

BS, Howard University, 1984

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

October 2020

Abstract

Instructional practices of elementary content teachers of English language learners (ELLs) and their alignment with improved ELL academic performance need to be explored. The purpose of this case study was to explore the instructional practices of elementary teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. The study is grounded in Ladson-Billings' theory of culturally relevant pedagogy which holds that student academic achievement and cultural identity should be affirmed. The research questions focused on exploring instructional practices used by teachers to support ELL learning and the teachers' perceptions regarding how their practices are aligned with improved ELL academic performance. The case study was bounded by 3 elementary schools in an Eastern school district. Data from lesson plans and semi-structured interviews with 9 general education teachers who met the criteria of teaching in an elementary school in the geographical area were analyzed using a priori, open, and axial coding. The findings suggest that positive strategies for cooperative learning and varied instructional practices were in use, but there is a need to build culturally appropriate and collaborative relationships with English to Speakers of Other Languages teachers, develop means to communicate with ELL parents to break cultural barriers, and create a welcoming learning atmosphere for ELLs. A policy recommendation paper was developed to improve ELL pedagogy in content classes. Improved instruction for ELLs will contribute to positive social change by increasing ELL students' academic achievement.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to the loving memory of my parents, who I miss dearly and think about daily. They supported me through every endeavor of my life. To my father, who was my first example of manhood and for instilling confidence in me. To my mother, who provided me the necessary tools needed to commit to life-long learning. To my wife, Dawn, and our children, Damon, Ashley, Amber, Destany, and Mekhi, thank you for your love and support. And finally, this work is dedicated to all the hardworking men and women in the education profession who strive to provide excellence to those they serve.

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Section 1: The Problem

As student populations become increasingly diverse in public schools and the achievement gap between ELLs and English-speaking students continue to grow, researchers, lawmakers, and school district personnel seek ways to increase student performance. Federal laws and initiatives such as Race to the Top (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2009) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (USDOE, 2015) have been designed to close the performance gap between English Language Learning (ELL) and non-ELL students. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2017), ELLs scored significantly lower than non-ELLs in reading and math at the fourth-grade level. The existence of this persistent performance gap and demographic trends demonstrating an increase of ELLs in public school classrooms (USDOE, 2017a) has sparked improvement efforts in the field of ELL instruction (Dallavis, 2014).

The Local Problem

The problem, in a Virginia school district, is a need to explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. The setting for this exploratory case study was three elementary schools in a metropolitan school district that has total student enrollment of over 90,000. The district includes over 90 elementary, middle, and high schools. The three schools average over 30 content teachers and each school has one principal and one assistant principal. The average class size of each school is 25. Leaders in the local district are charged with the task of

meeting and exceeding state standards while helping ELLs become proficient in English. On-time graduation rates in this Virginia school district exceed state averages overall (92%) but ELLs comprise the lowest on-time graduation rates (82%) of all student groups. In the local setting, it is important to understand how content teachers use research-based ELL instructional strategies because such approaches are linked to improved ELL academic performance (Turkan & Burzick, 2016). A gap in practice exists at the local level where, according to the school districts' supervisor of program evaluation, there is not a clear understanding of which instructional strategies are being used in the classroom. This gap points to an apparent gap between best practices and existing practices. This study addressed this gap in practice.

The increasing diversity of student populations has presented unique challenges for teachers who instruct ELLs in their classrooms. Teachers work with students who are faced with the dual task of attaining academic knowledge while overcoming linguistic barriers (Perez & Kennedy, 2014). These barriers often require teachers to make instructional accommodations in the classroom to assist ELLs' academic performance (Pappamihel & Lynn, 2016). According to Schulz et al. (2014), teachers are challenged to construct cultural bridges to link students' home and school lives to enhance academic achievement. With increasing diversity in U.S. schools, a study about the ELL instructional practices of elementary content teachers was warranted.

Rationale for Problem Choice

ELLs at the study site are receiving services to assist in meeting and exceeding state content standards. However, leaders have struggled to improve student achievement

of ELLs. Part of these services includes academic language instruction in English, math, and science. Reasons for their low-performance levels are unknown and warrant exploration of teachers' perspectives about how to improve ELLs' academic performance. The following subsection contains evidence of the problem at the local and national levels.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The rationale at the local level for addressing this problem includes the academic underperformance of ELLs compared to their non-ELL peers. At the local setting, 37% of ELL reading scores and 31% of ELL math scores in Grades 3–8 scored as “failing” in the Standards of Learning standardized testing program (VDOE, 2018). Non-ELL students have failure rates of only 15% and 17%, respectively, for reading and math, which indicates that the problem is current and meaningful at the local level. Nationally, ELLs scored lower than non-ELLs in reading and math according to the NAEP (2017). In math, the achievement gap was even more significant between non-ELLs and ELLs, as the difference was 25 points at the fourth-grade level and increased to 41 points at the eighth-grade level (Kena et al., 2014). There is also a gap between the graduation rates of ELLs and non-ELLs (USDOE, 2016). Closing ELL academic achievement gaps are a concern at the local school district. Therefore, to assist ELLs in meeting the student achievement standards of non-ELLs, the local school district provides language instruction support at each K-12 school. The gap in academic performance between ELLs and their non-ELL counterparts is a component of the rationale for this study.

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

A disparity exists between ELLs and other ethnic subgroups in student performance and socioeconomic status. African American and Hispanic American academic performance have improved, causing the gap in performance between these two groups and other nonethnic students to decrease. However, the educational difference in performance between ELLs and nonethnic subgroups remained unchanged (Carnoy & Garcia, 2017). As non-ELL Asian students are performing at higher levels than White students in reading and mathematics achievement, Asian and Hispanic ELLs are falling further behind White students (Carnoy & Garcia, 2017). Socioeconomic disparities also exist because ELLs are more likely to have a higher rate of poverty than European American, African American, Asian American, and Hispanic American non-ELLs. This low socioeconomic status correlates significantly with lower academic achievement (Barragan et al., 2018; Gay, 2013). The achievement gaps and socioeconomic disparities, then, support the need to for this study, which addresses the problem.

There is widespread uncertainty among elementary content teachers about how to teach ELLs. Elementary teachers of ELLs face the dual challenge of promoting academic achievement across subject areas and teaching English language and literacy to a mixed group, some of whom speak English and some who cannot speak English (Lee & Buxton, 2013). According to Diaz et al. (2016), some content teachers have low expectations for students with underdeveloped language and literacy skills. Often, they hesitate to acknowledge that high academic performance can be expected before ELLs develop English skills (Diaz et al., 2016). Selecting instructional models for ELLs can be an

added task to accurately measure teacher performance in the classroom (Von Esch & Kavanagh, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to address content teachers' uncertainty about how to address ELLs' academic problems. The purpose of this case study was to explore the instructional practices of elementary teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance.

Definitions

To establish common terminology and understanding of key terms in this study, the following definitions are provided:

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is teaching that “addresses student achievement and helps students accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469).

Culturally relevant instruction (CRI) is a pedagogical approach that recognizes and embraces the prior knowledge, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities of students in all aspects of learning (Gay, 2002; Schulz et al., 2014).

Significance

The findings of this study are significant to teachers as they can benefit by gaining an understanding of the instructional practices that are applied with the intention of improving the academic performance of ELLs. According to O'Brien and Leighton (2015), knowledge of instructional methods is needed to identify ways to strengthen ELLs' conceptual knowledge and academic achievement. A better understanding of

instructional practice alignment with research-based practices may provide greater insight when educating teachers who have ELLs in their classroom (Feiman-Neimser, 2018). Research on instructional strategies may provide teachers with support to raise the standard of ELLs' academic performance (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015). Increasing teachers' understanding of instructional practices for ELLs may provide students with better opportunities to succeed academically.

Low-performing ELLs can produce socioeconomic hardships for the community and the students. Graduation rates of ELLs lag behind those of all other subgroups in the United States (Mitchel, 2016), and such academic performance and high dropout rates have been linked to persistent low income among adults (Grady & O'Dwyer, 2014). Stark and Noel (2015) found that most unemployed adults were high school dropouts. The economic and social importance of ELLs in U.S. communities continues to rise, and by 2025, ELLs are expected to make up 20% of the workforce. As a result, improvement in the educational outcomes of ELLs has become an essential goal for educators (American Federation of Teachers [AFT], 2013). The findings of this study could provide a better understanding of the existing instructional practices of elementary teachers of ELLs and an exploration of pedagogies that are perceived to improve ELL academic performance.

This study may contribute to positive social change by producing a deeper understanding of instructional practices of content elementary teachers and which practices teachers perceive to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. A deeper understanding of the phenomenon could benefit stakeholders, namely, the

teachers, the school district leadership, and the community. These stakeholders may benefit from a better understanding of the ELL instructional practices of content elementary teachers and help school officials make informed decisions that provide teachers with the necessary knowledge to support ELLs. Instructional practices that connect teaching to ELL academic achievement benefit ELLs (Lee & Buxton, 2013). Connecting instruction to ELL academic achievement provides adequate language support to master content subject matters (Kim, 2017). Connecting instructional practices also means allowing students to draw from their lived experiences and cultural backgrounds to bring equitable learning opportunities into the classroom (Lee et al., 2014). Thus, the results of this study could be used to improve the instructional practices of content elementary teachers with ELLs.

Research Questions

The problem that this study addressed is a need to explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. The following questions guided this study:

- RQ 1: What instructional practices do elementary content teachers say they use to support ELL learning?
- RQ 2: What practices are perceived to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance?

Review of the Literature

This literature review begins with a discussion of the conceptual framework used to guide this study, including a description of the constructs of culturally relevant instruction, and the benefits of integrating it into the classroom. Following the conceptual framework is a comprehensive review of research related to: (a) culturally relevant curriculum (CRC), (b) student engagement, and (c) instructional practices. These subtopics provide an explanation of the research problem.

In conducting the literature search, the following databases were used: Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), PsycINFO, SocINDEX with Full Text, and ProQuest Criminal Justice. The literature search primarily focused on sources published in peer-reviewed journals within the last 5 years, using the following keywords and topics: *culturally and linguistically diverse, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive instruction, culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant curriculum, culturally relevant teaching, English Language Learners, English as a Second Language, instructional practices, multicultural curriculum, student engagement, and teacher perceptions*. All the articles included in this literature review were peer reviewed.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was based on Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore the phenomenon of the instructional practices of elementary teachers of ELLs

and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance.

Culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings's (1994, 1995, & 2006) theory of CRP was rooted in the theoretical tenets of Vygotskian theory of social and cognitive construction that originated in the 1990s from research on educational inequity of ethnically diverse students. Fundamental to this basic understanding is the Vygotskian explanation for the cultural shifts occurring among the children in today's classroom. Vygotsky (1978) recognized the importance of how cultural, social, and historical factors, have an impact on students' thinking and learning. Vygotsky noted that individuals construct knowledge based on their prior learning experiences. Guided by the instruction of their teachers, students can be proficient learners when educational experiences relate to their cultures.

CRP is the framework for the research design components of this study, which involved an exploration of instructional practices intended to support ELL learning and teachers' perspectives about which practices are most effective. According to Ladson-Billings (1995),

Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions; (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and; (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (p. 160)

Davis and McCarther (2015) asserted that teachers who use CRP discover effective instructional practices that acknowledge students' cultural backgrounds in the identified

learning style of students. CRP involves instructional practices that draw on students' cultural and linguistic strengths, which enable students to reach higher levels of academic success (Powell et al., 2016). CRP can be a useful practice that empowers teachers to see culture as an asset to enrich students' social and academic achievement.

Critical race theory. The conceptual framework is also grounded in critical race theory (CRT). CRT is centered on the premise that racism is a normal part of American culture, White dominance over non-White people prevails externally and internally, and race is part of the American social construction (Delgado, 2000; Mitchell & Stewart, 2013; Ortiz & Jani, 2010). If educators ignore that the relationship between race, racism, and power is an integral part of American society, students of non-White cultures may not be aware of the richness of their culture. This lack of awareness becomes more evident when one ethnic group is portrayed more than or in place of the less dominant group. If students do not see themselves in the curriculum, they can become disconnected, causing them to lose interest and fall behind academically. The absence of this relationship has crept into the educational field, making CRT a useful tool in exploring what, if any, impact critical race theory may have on academic achievement.

The portrayal of European American prevalence in the classroom provides an opportunity to employ storytelling and counter-story telling methods to contest and reshape the traditional version of American history and offer a renewed counter-narrative voice to students of color. Experiential textbook counter-storytelling in education offers an alternative to the traditional textbook version of American history (Fuentes, 2013) by offering a counter-rhetorical voice and solutions to culture and race for students of color

(Bagley & Castro-Salazar, 2012; Banks & Hughes, 2013). Educational counter-storytelling turns “his-story” into “our-story” geared towards ensuring that the contributions of people of color are heard. With repeated exposure to reading curriculum in which children of color find literature that offers views of their cultural surroundings, reading achievement and reading engagement may have a positive impact on student performance (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2009). Highlighting the culturally relevant exploits of culturally and linguistically diverse children may improve student motivation that can lead to improved academic performance. With the addition of counter-storytelling in the instructional materials for ethnically diverse students, ELLs may be able to benefit from the cultural voices of their ancestors.

Why CRP is appropriate as part of the framework. CRP is an appropriate framework for this study because it has been associated with the improved engagement of students from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Wyatt (2014) stated that instruction that acknowledges cultural awareness and prior experiences supports student engagement. Wyatt examined seven teachers who incorporated the history and culture of students to engage culturally and linguistically diverse students in Hawaii. The teachers in the Wyatt study were able to provide instructional content more relevant to their students by connecting learning and classroom practices to students’ experiences. Through instructional practices that are culturally responsive, ELLs in the mainstream classroom can become more engaged because the content seems more relevant to them.

Key elements of the framework. CRP is based on three constructs: (a) academic success, (b) cultural competence, and (c) development of sociopolitical consciousness

(Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). The three constructs of CRP are applied when teachers have high expectations for the academic success of all students; when teachers develop cultural competence by working to find out about students' backgrounds, cultures, and experiences; and when teachers include illustrations for sociopolitical consciousness by creating opportunities to address social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Each of these elements is described below.

Academic success. Proponents of CRP view academic success as students achieving academic excellence and empowerment due to teacher instruction. This empowerment is manifested when instruction connects to students' life experiences. Such empowerment results from teacher understanding and integration of student cultural experiences with instructional materials (Berumen & Silva, 2014). Understanding student culture, according to Berumen and Silva (2014), allows teachers to develop a classroom culture that provides the keys to academic success.

Moreover, academic success in diverse classrooms involves culturally relevant teaching strategies that motivate and engage student learners. Academic success, as a component of CRP, requires student engagement with culturally relevant instruction to support the teaching and learning process (Cole et al., 2016). Instructional practices that make education relevant and engaging to students can help teachers encourage academic success in the classroom. Cole et al. (2016) further stated that teachers could promote academic success by leveraging students' backgrounds and merging them into the learning process. Wyatt (2014) affirmed that CRP allows teachers to make engaging adjustments to instruction without compromising student achievement. When teachers

are provided with the proper support, ethnically diverse students can achieve academic success. Academic success forms one of the elements of the conceptual framework for this study because it often follows CRP. Academic success often appears to be a consequence of the effective use of CRP, a concept that guided the design of this study.

Cultural competence. Teachers who display cultural competence support the development of students' positive cultural identities through culturally relevant text selection and instructional support. Teachers demonstrate cultural competence when they recognize their students' values, knowledge, and family traditions as strengths (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Teachers support cultural competence by connecting student culture with academic content. Forming cultural competence, according to Ladson-Billings, requires incorporating positive cultural identities into classroom instructional practices. Cultural competence is characterized by teachers who assist students in maintaining their cultural identities through CRP instructional practices while promoting academic success (Samuels et al., 2017). When students can keep their cultural identities, they remain engaged in learning activities in the classroom. Preserving the cultural identities of students involves a student-centered approach that celebrates the contributions, cultures, and backgrounds of all students. Teachers encourage cultural competence when each student can relate classroom instructional content to his or her cultural background (Garcia & Garcia, 2016). By adopting the principles of cultural competence, Garcia and Garcia saw an increase in Spanish-speaking students' academic performance. Academic success was accomplished by tapping into the richness of learners' cultural backgrounds. In another study, Kumar (2018) found creative ways to incorporate diversity into

instructional practices, helping teachers support positive student cultural identities.

Kumar was able to do this by finding creative ways to connect instructional practices and CRP into classroom coursework. Instructional methods that relate to the backgrounds of students can enhance the cultural identities of students.

Cultural competence forms the second element of the conceptual framework of this study. Cultural competence links students' backgrounds with instructional practice. It fits as part of my study because linking students' cultures with classroom subject matter may promote academic success. Underwood and Mensah (2018) used cultural competence as a construct for their conceptual framework when investigating science teacher educators' perceptions of CRP to engage and empower diverse learners. They found that science teacher educators emulated the fundamentals for CRP by realizing a basic perception of cultural responsiveness. The authors concluded that teachers who were committed to culturally relevant instruction would affirm those cultures represented in the classroom to develop cultural competence (Underwood & Mensah, 2018). Zock (2015) investigated how elementary teachers designed instruction to build cultural competence among urban students by adding culture and language in the classroom. They were able to improve cultural competence through the selection of texts that included the positive accomplishments of ethnically diverse people. Linking students' culture with classroom subject matter, according to Hogan-Chapman, et al. (2017), is one of the keys to effective student learning. The authors found that cultural competence can bridge the gap between home and school cultures. By linking students' backgrounds with

instructional practice, teachers may be able to develop strategies that will enhance performance among diverse learners.

Sociopolitical consciousness. The third element of the conceptual framework is sociopolitical consciousness. Sociopolitical consciousness originates from CRT, and encourages teachers to critically analyze their personal biases to promote equality and the social forces shaping society in ethnically diverse classrooms. It aligns with this study because fostering political, economic, and social equality is essential in sociopolitical conscious classrooms. Seider et al. (2018) used sociopolitical consciousness as a construct of their study by exploring the role schools play in fostering racial inequality and offering insight into developing instructional practices on racial and social inequality. Teachers who can analyze their personal biases are better equipped to assist and prepare students to become resilient to racial and social inequality.

Teachers can act as facilitators of sociopolitical consciousness by challenging the status quo and cultural norms. Sociopolitical consciousness refers to teachers' understanding of social challenges borne by learners within their own culture (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Aronson and Laughter (2016) found that educators can meet these challenges by integrating social justice concepts into classroom instruction and by evaluating social inequalities faced in communities specific to the students in the class. Teaching diverse student populations consists of expanding the role educators' play to foster sociopolitical consciousness. Daniel (2016) affirmed that teachers can gain sociopolitical consciousness when they recognize and reflect on their personal biases and acknowledge the inequitable distribution of power within society. Daniel found that

personal preference becomes evident when nonminority teachers disregard the cultural differences of diverse student populations in their classrooms. Developing a stronger knowledge base of the cultural backgrounds and experiences of students and applying this knowledge to instructional practices can help teachers avoid personal bias and raise the sociopolitical consciousness of learners (Daniel, 2016). Having sociopolitical consciousness means that teachers should use knowledge about their students' cultural backgrounds to meet their educational needs and encourage students to recognize the conditions of injustice and inequalities in their communities (Gambrell, 2017). Sociopolitically conscious learning promotes students' capacity to become social change agents. Casting personal bias aside, culturally relevant educators understand and include instructional materials that represent their classroom demographics. Teachers who can associate issues of social disparities into the classroom may meet the educational needs of students whose ethnicities are different from their own (Gambrell, 2017).

One of the goals of the conceptual framework is to show relationships or interrelationships between the major elements of the framework. Academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness involve appropriate learning supports, culturally relevant text selection, and linking social disparities that establish relationships with students and their communities (Pena-Sandoval, 2017). According to Christ and Sharma (2018), the significant elements of the framework are also interrelated since they support student engagement, positive identity reinforcement, and expound upon the cultures and lived experiences of diverse students. DeCapua and Marshall (2015) pointed out that culturally relevant instruction begins when teachers develop

cultural competence through the recognition of students' lived experiences. Once cultural competence is established, teachers can demonstrate their commitment to CRP by creating a classroom culture of academic success by improving the higher-order thinking skills of all students (Underwood & Mensah, 2018). Finally, after teachers create a tenet of cultural competence and academic success, culturally competent teachers can facilitate an examination of social order and address social inequities while cultivating a sense of self-worth (Allen et al., 2017). Unlike cultural competence and academic success, sociopolitical consciousness may not be linked to improved academic performance. However, the lessons of sociopolitical consciousness may be so crucial that ELL instruction can only qualify as effective if it addresses social structure.

How the framework relates to the study's components. The primary research components for the study are the research problem, the purpose, the research questions (RQs), data collection, and data analysis. These are all guided by the conceptual framework. CRP served as a lens through which one may view content teachers' instructional practices and their perceptions about their practices when teaching ELLs.

The problem and purpose statements are defined, in part, by the conceptual framework. This is because effective ELL instructional practices are defined, for the purposes of this study, as practices that align with the constructs of CRP, including academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. Effective instructional practices of teachers of ELLs, then, will demonstrate value for lived experiences of students (Mason, 2017), position students' lived experiences at the forefront of the learning process (Boyce & Chouinard, 2017), and encourage students to

recognize the conditions of injustice and inequality in their communities (Gambrell, 2017). Instructional methods that incorporate the history and culture of students can create the tenets of academic success, develop cultural competence, and cultivate a sense of self-worth through sociopolitical consciousness.

Similarly, CRP guides the research questions in that instructional practices for this study are defined as those that align with students' academic success, cultural competence, and the development of sociopolitical consciousness. To methodically address the purpose of the study, the research questions are aligned with the methodology (Yin, 2014). Heitner and Jennings (2016) aligned their research questions with the methodology to determine to what extent faculty members are knowledgeable about and use culturally responsive instructional practices. The findings revealed knowledge gaps educators had concerning culturally responsive instructional practices. The work of Heitner and Jennings is vital to this study, the conceptual framework, and the research questions because better knowledge of culturally responsive instructional practices align with students achieving cultural competence. To determine the benefit of integrating culturally responsive teaching strategies, Chen and Yang (2017) found that culturally responsive instructional strategies increased student engagement and enhanced communication skills in the classroom. The work of Chen and Yang is essential to this study, the conceptual framework, and the research questions because an engaged student could result in enhanced student performance. In addressing research questions on what teachers' prevailing attitudes are towards ELLs, Mellom et al. (2018) used data collected from a qualitative study on the effects of CRP teacher training on ELL academic

outcomes to understand how teachers incorporate culturally responsive instruction in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. The work of Mellom et al. is significant to this study, the conceptual framework, and my research questions because a better understanding of teachers' instructional practices using CRP can be aligned with the improved academic performance of ELLs. Samuels et al. (2017) explored how instructional approaches influenced teachers' understanding of CRP and cultivate increased socio-political consciousness in the classroom. The work of Samuels et al. is central to this study, the conceptual framework, and the research questions because increased socio-political awareness can promote racial equity in ethnically diverse classrooms. Teachers can incorporate instructional practices that encourage academic success, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness in the classroom.

CRP guided the data collection through semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. The interview protocols for several semi-structured interviews originated from the constructs of the conceptual framework. Hoque (2018) provided an example of this practice. The study also consisted of semi-structured interviews to explore the components of the cultural identity of 16 British-born Bangladeshi Muslim students. Hoque found that a culturally responsive education model in the curriculum can provide a haven for students to explore their cultures. Hoque matched the interview protocol with CRP to ensure that the conceptual framework aligned with data collection. Other studies (Gist, 2017; Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017) also aligned interview questions with instructional practices and CRP. The semi-structured interview protocols of the

study, based on the constructs of CRP, are supported in the research literature as an appropriate practice for data collection.

Review of the Broader Problem

To explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with ELL improved academic performance, five areas of literature were reviewed: (a) CRC, (b) student engagement, (c) instructional practices, (d) culturally responsive instructional practices, and (e) teachers' beliefs about ELL instruction. CRC relates to this study because a curriculum that can connect lessons to student experiences is better able to serve classrooms made up of diverse learners (Wyatt, 2014). A CRC incorporates learning materials that depict the positive historical exploits of ethnically diverse students. According to Wyatt (2014), adjustments to the curriculum are necessary to engage and support culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Wyatt furthered stated that CRC adjustments include instructional materials that acknowledge students' backgrounds and lived experiences. Lei et al. (2018) asserted that a student who is enthusiastically engaged in their educational tasks performs better academically. Lei et al. found that a relationship existed between student engagement and academic achievement. Not only did engaged students perform better but student retention rates also improved.

A better understanding of how teachers perceive instructional practices will help prepare educators face the challenges that exist for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Feiman-Neimser, 2018; Wong et al., 2017). Feiman-Neimser stressed that teacher education programs should include courses on instructional practices that

evidence teacher understanding of ethnically diverse students' academic needs. Feiman-Neimser pointed out that teacher education programs that stress best practice instructional courses, will assist educators with ELLs, given the increase of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. The literature reviewed for this study, then, included these relevant elements, which identify the components that encompass the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs.

Culturally relevant curriculum. When the curriculum is meaningful, and the instruction matches their cultural background, students perform better. DeCapua (2016) found that teachers can reduce cultural differences by building on the cultural experience of students to enhance student performance. Meaningful curriculum and instruction incorporate content elements that recognize students as individuals who have unique histories and life experiences. Meaningful and matching achievements and familiar referents of ELLs are essential characteristics of a CRC (Dong, 2017). Familiar referents, according to Dong, include instructional materials that mirror ELL home culture and life experiences. While preparing teachers to teach subject matter content to ELLs, Dong also found that meaningful curriculum and instruction that make social studies learning experience relevant to taps into ELL learning styles and bridges their cultural backgrounds using familiar referents. A CRC goes beyond the biographies of notable historical figures and infuses content with meaning for ELLs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). A CRC accentuates the culture and prior knowledge of ELLs to bridge the instructional content presented in the classroom (Dong, 2017). A CRC can enhance students' academic success by engaging ELLs using their cultural and experiential

knowledge in classroom learning opportunities (Jaffe, 2016). Jaffe examined social study teachers who were able to engage ELLs through culturally and linguistically relevant materials. Meaningful CRC, according to Jaffe, is applied when implementing social studies instructional content that acknowledge students' culture and lived experiences. A CRC that matches student interest can result in engaged and better-performing students.

Proponents of a CRC surmised that students respond better when instruction materials relate students' school experiences with their cultural reality. This relationship can be accomplished by emphasizing the cultural backgrounds of diverse student populations (Samuels, 2018). Samuels explored perceptions of elementary teachers on being socio-culturally conscious and learning about students' lives. Learning about the lives of students helped teachers promote culturally relevant teaching by making applicable connections between curriculum materials and students' cultural experiences. Educators may benefit from viewing learning from the students' perspective by recognizing and authenticating students' cultures. Viewing learning from the perspective of students creates social relationships and a sense of community. Creating a sense of community builds relationships, which further strengthens the union between the teacher and student (Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017). According to Cramer and Bennett (2015), teachers can connect with their students by employing instructional practices that are responsive to the cultural demographics in their classrooms. This practice is done by nurturing effective communication among students while connecting with their home environment. Learning about students' family and home life can help teachers promote successful interactions with ethnically diverse students within the classroom. In essence,

when students make sense of their world, they respond better by using prior knowledge, past experiences, and cultural references.

Connecting student cultural backgrounds through a CRC also encourages stronger teacher-student relationships. The teacher-student bond is fortified when teachers engage their students in classroom activity, culture, and community to facilitate an appealing environment for all learners. Teacher-student relationships can increase when teachers partner with family and community members to include instructional practices that reflect the communities of students (Garland & Bryan, 2017). Partnering with community and families can allow teachers to go beyond their own cultural biases and learn about their students' cultures. According to Kim and Pulido (2015), developing the academic skills of students from diverse experiences is enhanced when teachers have a deeper understanding of their students' cultural backgrounds. Students can become active and engaged participants when their cultural backgrounds become part of classroom instructional materials. Teachers are better able to respond to the cultural diversity of their students when they become more knowledgeable of their students' culture and community (Saint-Hilaire, 2014). Responding to students' cultural diversity can help communicate high expectations to culturally and linguistically diverse students. Overall, teachers' ability to link instructional practices to students' cultural backgrounds can increase the teacher-student bond.

Research indicates that a curriculum that mirrors the cultural identities of students may positively influence academic achievement. Heafner and Fitchett (2018) used a qualitative approach to examine U.S. history content knowledge among ethnically diverse

high school students. They found that the inclusion of a curriculum, which reflects the cultural identities of students, had a positive influence on student performance. An Item Response Theory, which employed multi-step data analysis procedures, was used to measure ethnic groups' differences in academic achievement when the curriculum content included material related to their cultural make-up. To make the curriculum more meaningful for students of color, Heafner and Fitchett found there was a need to develop content material, which included the history and culture of students. This study underscores the importance of instructional exposure to culturally relevant practices when improving student performance among culturally and linguistically diverse students. The addition of a CRC can help teachers respond to the learning needs of low performing students. Roofe (2017) revealed that a CRC could reduce the challenges that prevent students from achieving academically. Roofe concluded that the inclusion of a CRC could mitigate the obstacles that prevent students from succeeding academically. Data were obtained from seven primary school teachers through interviews and observations. The data were analyzed through CRP and human learning theory to explore how to meet the needs of low performing reading students. To corroborate responses received during the semi-structured interviews, observations were used to focus on the curriculum and student performance. Teachers expressed concerns that the traditional curriculum was not meeting the needs of students and recommended that a culturally responsive curriculum should be adopted (Roofe, 2017). Gaining a deeper understanding of the role a CRC plays in academic achievement can assist ethnically diverse students.

A CRC can also aid in students' development of critical thinking skills. Ross and Stevenson (2018) used a conceptual framework that included critical race theory. They found that African American students showed an increase in critical thinking skills and engagement when the curriculum was culturally relevant. Data analysis consisted of one-on-one interviews, writing activities, and observations of student behaviors in small and large group discussions, which highlighted student academic progress. Framed by the constructs of CRP, the literacy program implemented a broad range of audio-visual and literacy activities related to science and social studies. Ross and Stevenson (2018) found that by offering culturally relevant reading materials, African American students exhibited increased levels of critical thinking associated with enhanced student achievement. The qualitative findings (Heafner & Fitchett, 2018; Roofe, 2017; Ross & Stevenson, 2018) support the use of CRP strategies that can positively affect academic achievement.

Student engagement. Learning approaches that emphasize student engagement have been linked to increased academic achievement. Collie et al. (2017) examined the extent to which student engagement was associated with student performance and found that learning approaches that emphasize student engagement predicted academic achievement. Implementing learning approaches that increase student engagement may assist culturally and linguistically diverse students who experience language barriers. Engaging culturally and linguistically diverse students with meaningful and culturally relevant instructional materials may enhance student performance (Collie et al., 2017). Investigating the relationship between student engagement and academic performance,

Balwant et al. (2018) found that student engagement was a crucial mechanism in connection with academic achievement. Samples of 183 undergraduate students studying at colleges across the UK were given questionnaires to measure student engagement. Balwant et al. further stated that academic achievement is positively affected when students are highly engaged and fully invested emotionally and cognitively in the classroom. Kim and Pulido (2015) studied the teaching practices of teachers who made instruction engaging and culturally relevant to students. Through hip-hop pedagogy, Kim and Pulido found students to be more engaged in the learning process when the content was relevant. The researchers conducted teacher interviews for one year to foster academic achievement by making the instruction engaging and relevant to ethnically diverse youth. Supporting student engagement involves selecting culturally relevant instruction and pedagogy (Christ & Sharma, 2018). Appropriate text selection includes knowledge about student's culture and background experience. Christ and Sharma (2018) found that engagement of students could be done through professional development, which focused on teachers learning about students' histories, backgrounds, and identities. When given a chance to view the cultural contributions through the curriculum and instructional support materials, teachers can sustain students' cultural competence. Improving student engagement using CRP can assist students in reaching their full academic potential.

Student engagement has also been linked to increased student retention rates. To evaluate the connection between student engagement, high school dropout rates, and student performance, Renda and Villares (2017) also found that student engagement

results in high school completion. They found that, when students were compared, the students who participated in a program that promoted engagement had significantly higher retention and performance rates than students who did not participate in the program. Kimbark et al. (2017) also found a significant positive relationship between engagement and academic achievement. They studied the influence of a Student Success Course (SCC) on retention, academic achievement, and student engagement. Data were collected from 432 SCC participants, and non-SCC participants and the Chi-square Test of Independence revealed that differences in proportions between nonparticipants and participants were significant. This study supported the view that student performance and retention become evident when programs emphasize student engagement.

CRP integrates teaching strategies that engage students by connecting home and school cultures. One of the goals of culturally relevant teaching, according to Davis and McCarther (2015), is to use strategies that acknowledge the importance of student culture and connect home experiences with student learning. Connecting home and school involves activities and assignments, which align with student backgrounds and experiences. Teaching strategies that include CRP in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms improve the engagement of learners (Hoque, 2018). Connecting home and school cultures through CRP encourage students to become engaged learners. Teachers who use CRP respond to the social and cultural perspectives of learners and engage students by connecting with their cultural backgrounds through instruction and curriculum (Wu, 2016). Students who were formerly disengaged can become more engaged in learning once they connect their culture to instruction.

Instruction that links ELL prior knowledge can enhance student engagement.

Christ and Sharma (2018) studied instruction that mirrored the lived experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students and found that teacher training should focus on teachers learning about student cultural backgrounds and applying this knowledge to culturally responsive text selection. Emergent coding and constant comparative analysis were used to identify the categories of challenges and successes that 17 pre-service teachers had in selecting and implementing culturally relevant texts. Once instructional materials are selected, it is essential to incorporate them into classroom lessons that connect with diverse students' backgrounds. Jaffe (2016) used a collective case study design to investigate how four social studies teachers were able to connect their instructional practices with ELL cultural experiences and found that students became better engaged when instruction reflected on their lived experiences. From that point, teachers were able to build upon those experiences to promote academic success. Jaffe employed research methods of data analysis, inquiry, and collection to document how ELLs were taught in a social studies classroom. This study provided insight into how best to meet the needs of ELLs using culturally responsive instruction to engage students in the social science classroom. Students are more engaged when instructional materials mirror their lived experiences.

Culturally responsive instructional practices. Instructional practices that embrace student culture can increase student performance. Lopez (2016) used hierarchical linear modeling to investigate the link between culturally relevant instruction (CRI) and student performance. Lopez found that incorporating instructional practices

that included the cultural background of students was positively related to improved student performance in reading across Grades 3 and 5. Questionnaires were distributed to study participants, which included 244 Latino students and their 16 teachers, to determine the degree to which teachers incorporated culture into the classroom experience of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Lopez concluded that there was a positive relationship between instructional strategies that focused on student culture and experience and students' reading achievement. Berumen and Silva (2014) also found that academic success can be achieved with instructional practices that emphasize student cultures. Teachers in this study were able to accomplish this by creating a culturally relevant classroom, which was achieved by infusing materials with real-life experiences that engaged the students. Berumen and Silva analyzed the narratives of pre-service teachers who used these materials with elementary students. Improving student performance among ethnically diverse students requires instructional practices that embrace student cultures.

There is a need to understand the challenges teachers face when they employ instructional practices to teach students from diverse backgrounds. According to Rubinstein-Avila and Lee (2014), many teachers feel inadequate because of their limited knowledge about how to teach ELLs. They further stated that the increase of ELLs and the lack of teacher instructional strategies have accounted for low academic achievement scores on state standardized testing. Teachers may become better equipped in the classroom by employing effective instructional practices for ELLs. Howard and Rodriguez-Scheel (2017) examined the self-efficacy beliefs of pre-service teachers. They

found that teachers who had favorable attitudes toward culturally relevant instruction demonstrated the most growth when connecting with culturally and linguistically diverse students. The quantitative study utilized pre- and posttest measures of the Multicultural Efficacy Scale to evaluate the challenges faced by undergraduate early-childhood teachers because of changes in student demographics and to instruct teachers on how to embrace CRI. The results supported the need to create opportunities for pre-service teachers to pair with mentor teachers who practice the concept of CRI in the classroom regularly. A better understanding of classroom challenges can assist teachers when employing CRI strategies.

Due to the growth of student diversity in the classroom, presenting culturally relevant instruction may be beneficial for all students. Lecture-based U.S. public schools are culturally relevant for high achieving European American students (USDOE, 2017b). According to Paul (2015), this lecture-based, Eurocentric instruction favors European American students. Now, classrooms are densely populated with ethnically diverse students, particularly students of Hispanic/Latino(a) origin (Bryant, 2017). Student-centered, culturally relevant instructional practices that engage ethnically diverse students can be incorporated in the classroom. Therefore, this demographic shift should influence classroom instructional practices that match student dynamics in the school.

Student-centered instructional practices and materials benefit learners when they acknowledge the positive historical contributions of children who are ethnically different from European American children. Conversely, Eurocentric approaches to instruction have, historically, enforced a master narrative that has left many non-White students

disillusioned with the curriculum's cultural dismissiveness. The student-centered approach engages ethnically diverse students by highlighting their historical accomplishments (Bissonnette & Glazier, 2016). Gambrell (2017) stated that many textbooks provide a mono-cultural view, which reinforces White privilege despite the growing diversity in public schools. Paul (2015) suggested that student-centered instructional practices could offer a healthy alternative to mono-cultural books. Ethnically diverse students may benefit from instructional materials that include their historical accomplishments.

Effective instructional practices for ELLs. A better understanding of elementary content teachers' perceptions of their instructional practice that supports ELL learning is vital. Gomez and Diarrassouba (2014) conducted a study of the perceptions of elementary teachers who taught culturally and linguistically diverse students and found that teachers were not adequately prepared to teach ELLs. Eighty percent of the teachers surveyed stated that they felt they were prepared to teach in a culturally diverse classroom; however, it was determined that they lacked the cultural knowledge to implement instructional practices that were suitable for the history and backgrounds of ELLs. A mixed-method research approach was used to explore the correlation between their understanding of their ELLs' learning needs and teacher preparation. Data from 116 K-8th-grade teachers were collected and examined through a web-based survey using a Pearson *chi-square* test to determine whether observations on two or more variables were independent of one another. Research has conclusively shown that teachers who have

developed cultural competency are likely to be more successful at meeting heterogeneous learners' academic needs.

Pappamihel and Lynn, (2016) studied 156 ELL teachers who were asked their perceptions concerning instructional and linguistic accommodations needed to support ELL academic performance and discovered that many of the participants were not comfortable implementing the adjustments. These accommodations addressed the individual skills and challenges faced by ELL students. Data were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics from information collected from an online survey. Teachers were asked to give examples of and explain the differences between instructional and linguistic accommodations. The researchers concluded that mainstream teachers need to be better equipped to implement adequate linguistic and instructional accommodations to improve the academic performance of ELLs in the classroom. Teachers who are confident in using their expertise applying instructional strategies that accommodate the linguistic trials ELLs face may be able to enhance student performance.

According to Grasparil and Hernandez (2015), ELL high dropout rates were attributed to poor literacy achievement. The researchers found that implementing effective reading instructional practices may enhance student performance among ELLs. Grasparil and Hernandez revealed that a mismatch between a widely used reading program component and ELL instructional needs accounted for poor literacy performance. They used a multiple regression analysis to predict reading comprehension results among third grade ELLs to examine the achievement gap between non-ELLs and ELLs. Grasparil and Hernandez concluded that effective instructional strategies for

ELLs should consider activities that include verbal reading articulation, phonemic cognizance, language, phonics, and comprehension. Instructional practices that are research-based may increase the graduation and literacy performance among linguistically challenged students.

Teachers' beliefs about ELL instruction. ELLs' educational experiences can be positively or negatively shaped by a teacher's actions and dependent on the teacher's beliefs and instructional approaches. Murphy and Torff (2019), collected surveys from teachers that investigated their opinions on the rigor of classroom activities. They found that the participants favored a less vigorous curriculum for ELLs as opposed to non-ELLs. A less rigorous curriculum, according to the authors, may contribute to the academic achievement gap that exists among ELLs and non-ELL students. Respondents were asked to rate the activities for both groups, high and low, in which they assessed the effectiveness of classroom activities. For ELLs to receive an equitable education, the authors concluded that teacher educators need to develop effective strategies to assist teachers. These strategies that target teachers' beliefs may have the potential to enhance ELL student performance.

Researchers also focused on how teachers' beliefs guided their curriculum decisions and their impact on students learning opportunities. Using qualitative methods, de Araujo (2017) examined how teachers' beliefs manifested in their selection of tasks based on the linguistic and mathematical abilities of ELLs. de Araujo found that the impact of teachers' benign teaching beliefs and practices need to be critically explored to counter potential negative educational experiences of ELLs. Data sources included semi-

structured interviews, observations, and surveys of certified English as Second Language math teachers. Each teacher's selection of tasks was analyzed to understand better how their beliefs about ELLs determine curriculum selections. de Araujo concluded that teachers must embrace the cultural and linguistic diversity ELLs bring to the classroom and give students the tools necessary to engage in challenging mathematics. The tasks teachers select based on their beliefs about their students may impact ELLs' academic performance.

Teacher beliefs may impact his or her behavior, thus impacting student learning in the classroom. Examining the opinions of teachers before and after an ELL course on second language acquisition and assessment, Clark-Goff and Eslami (2016) found that teacher beliefs can be altered to overcome misconceptions regarding ELLs. A survey was designed to measure teachers' pre-existing beliefs about teaching ELLs via semistructured focus group interviews. To capture participants' views about English language learning and teaching, Clark-Goff and Eslami used descriptive analysis. Uncovering teachers' beliefs concerning ELLs can be crucial if those beliefs translate to teachers having lower student performance expectations for ELLs.

To explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with ELL improved academic performance, five areas of literature were reviewed: (a) culturally relevant curriculum, (b) student engagement, (c) culturally responsive instructional practices, (d) effective instructional practices for ELLs, and (e) teachers' beliefs about ELLs. CRP framed the research design components of this study, which is based on three constructs:

(a) academic success, (b) cultural competence, and (c) development of sociopolitical consciousness. Also, through the literature, this researcher explored instructional practices intended to support ELL learning and teachers' perspectives about which methods are most effective.

Implications

The findings from this study were used to develop a project. The project took the form of a policy paper designed to inform the efforts of the local school district to improve instructional practices for ELLs. This project also added to what is known about the education of ELLs by providing information on the instructional practices of elementary content teachers. By examining how a group of teachers see their role in delivering instruction and understanding their practices, it may assist similar schools when considering the instructional practices of teachers. This study contributed to positive social change by producing a deeper understanding of instructional methods that can inform academic improvement efforts for ELLs.

Summary

The local setting reveals uncertainty about the instructional practices utilized by elementary content teachers, who may or may not be using CRP to support ELL learning. This qualitative study addressed a need to explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance.

Section 1 contained the introduction to the study, the definition of the problem, rationale, evidence of the problem at the local level, evidence of the problem from the

professional literature, definition of terms, the significance of the study, research questions, review of the literature, conceptual frameworks and study implications.

Section 2 includes descriptions of the study's methodology, including the participants, the data collection, the analysis processes, and the study's limitations.

Section 2: The Methodology

The purpose of this case study was to explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how the teachers perceive those practices to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. In Section 2, the qualitative research design is presented and supported. Sampling strategies, data collection, data analysis, and other procedures are explained, followed by a discussion of the trustworthiness and limitations of the study.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The problem that this study addressed was a need to explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how the teachers perceive those practices to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. This researcher used an exploratory case study methodology, which appropriately addressed the research questions:

RQ 1: What instructional practices do elementary content teachers say they use to support ELL learning?

RQ 2: What practices are perceived to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance?

Both questions are exploratory in nature, framed by a specific setting, and require qualitative analysis to be addressed (see Lodico et al., 2013). An exploratory case study is a suitable approach if (a) the literature provides limited information about the phenomena, and (b) there is a need for further exploration of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to the supervisor of program evaluation at the schools of interest

for the study, administrators were unsure which instructional practices are utilized by elementary content teachers of ELLs. Thus, an exploratory case study design was an appropriate method to gain in-depth information related to the research problem from semi-structured interviews with teachers' perspectives and qualitative analysis of lesson plans (see Yin, 2014).

Other researchers have endorsed the use of an exploratory case study for similar studies. Prince (2018) used an exploratory case study to understand better how teachers enhanced their instructional practices with ELLs in the classroom. Likewise, the aim of this research was to understand the aspects of teachers' instructional practices with ELLs. Another example that substantiates the use of an exploratory case study is Rodriguez-Arroyo's and Vaughns's (2015) study on the preparation processes for teacher candidates before working with ELLs. As was the case for Prince's research and the current study, an exploratory case study served Arroyo and Vaughns well as a methodology to address the study's research questions. The data collected from an exploratory case study conducted by Vu and Feinstein (2017) provided answers for the *what*, *how*, and *why* type of questions when gaining a better understanding of student performance and teacher perception of game-based learning in STEM classrooms. Guzey and Ring-Whalen (2018) chose an exploratory case study because there was little research that documented teacher perceptions regarding engineering integration in the science curriculum. Therefore, an exploratory case study is the best choice to address the need to explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance.

Description of the Qualitative Tradition

An exploratory case study was used to identify and support statements from the participants to deepen understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). An exploratory case study can be conducted to address research questions qualitatively and is intended to explore those situations for further examination of the event being investigated, especially when the outcomes of a phenomenon are not evident (Yin, 2014). For example, Marschall and Andrews (2015) chose an exploratory case study design when they investigated teacher perceptions of the teaching of linear equations. Similarly, in this study, it was unclear what instructional practices the teachers were using and what outcomes were presumed to result.

Justification of Research Design

An exploratory case study design was selected as appropriate for the following reasons. An exploratory case study can be used to gain an in-depth understanding of the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with improved academic performance (Merriam, 1998). An exploratory case study provided an enhanced understanding of pedagogical strategies content teachers use to teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms. This is because the exploratory case study can be used to obtain in-depth and detailed information from participants using qualitative data collection, such as semi-structured interviews and document analysis (Yin, 2014). Comprehensive and accurate information was needed to address the purpose of this study. Exploratory case studies can be used as a research design when up-front information is limited about a topic or study (Lodico et

al., 2013). Payne and Burrack (2017) selected an exploratory case study to explore pre-service teachers' ePortfolio processes and their connection to teacher effectiveness. Their exploratory case study strategy was suitable to investigate performance and development within the instructional practices. The exploratory case study brought an understanding of the phenomenon of elementary content teachers' instructional practices of ELLs

Most of the literature concerning the study topic was not quantitative, as qualitative research lends itself to examining the perceptions of the participants of this study (Merriam, 2009). Other likely choices of methodology were considered and not chosen. Ethnographies, grounded theory studies, and phenomenology were among those considered for the present research study but were determined to be less effective than an exploratory case study.

Ethnography. Ethnographies are used to describe an entire culture group in a natural setting over a prolonged period. The considerations usually include the language, beliefs, and ideas of those within the culture that develops over time (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The researcher develops a close relationship with participants who are being researched (Lodico et al., 2013) with the aim of acquiring a deeper understanding of human nature and culture (Merriam, 2002). Incorporating an ethnographic study is suitable when there is a culture-sharing group to study. Because the intent of the present study was not to represent shared cultural knowledge, ethnography was not chosen as the methodology.

Grounded theory. Another method of qualitative research, grounded theory, incorporates an inductive approach for analyzing data over a long period to build a theory

from the ground up (Lodico et al., 2015). Grounded theory proceeds through a process that forms an approach by systematically collecting data, identifying themes, and then connecting these themes (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2017). The present study was not an attempt to build theory regarding teacher's perception of culturally relevant instruction. In the case of this study, the specific problem addressed the need to explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance.

Phenomenology. According to Merriam (2002), phenomenologists are interested in capturing interpretations as they pertain to the participants' perceptions by equating, evaluating, and connecting the lived experiences of the phenomenon. The information received from participants in phenomenological research describes what the experience was as well as how it was experienced. Phenomenology refers to how people receive, remember, and evaluate a phenomenon and how it relates to other people (Patton, 2015). Phenomenological methods were inappropriate to answer the research questions because the purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the lived experiences of the teacher participants. Ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology do not offer the opportunity to obtain sufficient insight about the instructional practices of content elementary teachers and practices they perceive to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. The exploratory case study is more appropriate for obtaining rich, in-depth descriptions provided through interviews and teachers' lesson plans.

Participants

The participants selected for this qualitative study included content elementary teachers who have ELL students in their classrooms at the study site. Purposeful sampling was the qualitative method used to select participants because this type of sampling allows the researcher to gain insights from the criteria-based study (Merriam, 2014), the participants can maximize the subject matter based on their knowledge and experience (Creswell, 2015; Merriam, 2009), and the researcher can select participants with similar attributes who have fundamental knowledge related to the study's purpose (Lodico et al., 2010). The selection criteria for the participants were: (a) they must be regular content teachers, and (b) they must have ELLs in their classroom at some point in their tenure.

Number of Participants Justified

According to Merriam (2014), an adequate number of participants is needed; however, this number can vary widely depending upon the research question. The numbers of participants selected were sufficient for added balance and the depth inquiry for this study (Creswell, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015). A small sample size of eight to 10 participants is large enough for a diverse group (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Creswell (2013) and Yin (2014) agreed that the sample size should be small enough to gather in-depth data on each participant and provide a sense of uniqueness that will allow patterns to emerge from respondents. The sample size selected should prove sufficient in exploring teacher perceptions about their instructional practices and how these practices are aligned with improved academic performances of ELLs. Creswell and Creswell (2017) and

Palinkas et al. (2015) suggested that a small number of participants can be used, but the researcher should remember that the data extracted must yield an in-depth discovery of information. Fusch and Ness (2015) stated that as few as six interviews could provide enough data to reach saturation. Chen and Yang (2017) used only three participants to examine the implementation of culturally relevant instructional strategies in an ESL classroom. With fewer participants, the researcher can make a more in-depth analysis of the data. If the number of participants is too low, a snowball, chain, or network sampling may be employed to find additional willing participants (Merriam, 2014). The sample size for the study was deemed appropriate.

Procedure for Gaining Access to Participants

This project study was made possible through a partnership agreement between Walden University and the school district. To gain access to participants, I completed an application form written to the district's review board. Next, I obtained a letter of cooperation from the appropriate district administrator and all other materials required completing the IRB application. Once written IRB approval was granted, I obtained contact information from the administrator. I contacted all potential participants who met the selection criteria with an invitation to participate using email addresses publicly listed on the school's website. The communication included informed consent, emphasizing that participation was voluntary, and there would be no repercussions for nonparticipation.

The purpose of the informed consent in writing was to ensure that each participant understood that participation was voluntary, and each teacher could withdraw at any

point during the study. Participants were asked to sign the consent forms electronically and return via email. They were also informed that responses would be kept confidential, no identifying information would be used at any phase in the study, and no harm or adverse effects would result from participating in the study. Participants received a follow-up email with a list of time slots to schedule a date for their audio FreeConferenceCall.com interviews. They were given the option of using their personal email for future contact, if desired. If they were unable to meet during the time slots listed, I arranged to accommodate their schedules appropriately.

Establishing Rapport

There are several ways to develop the researcher/participant relationship. Glesne (2015) stated the importance of fostering trust to develop a good rapport among participants. To build rapport, first, I warmly communicated with each participant. I carefully provided a pleasant tone in all my communications before and during the interview process (Baur et al., 2010). As noted earlier, I accommodated each participant's schedule when arranging interview times. Researchers who are courteous and respectful toward their participants have a better opportunity to receive positive feedback during the interview process (Merriam, 2009). At each semi-structured interview, I engaged in some polite, casual conversation with the participants to establish a sense of comfort and rapport. I gently encouraged them to ask any questions they may have relating to the study. Also, a researcher who is impartial, nonjudgmental, and skilled in listening can maximize participant response and interaction (Elmir et al., 2011). Since I was not personally in the room with the teachers, it was challenging for some of

them to set up and operate FreeConferenceCall.com. The participants were advised that the FreeConferenceCall.com interview would take an hour or less. Establishing a good rapport was essential in putting the participants at ease during the interview process.

Protection of Participants Rights

I took the following measures to make sure that the participants were protected from any adverse consequences that could result from participating in the study. To maintain participant confidentiality, I did not use the names of the teachers, the school, or the school district during the study (Glesne, 2011). Each participant's identity and interview data will be kept private and confidential (Butz & Stupnisky, 2017). Also, the name of the school district remained confidential. I contacted participants by school email and phone, if necessary, to schedule times for the interviews. The virtual interviews took place at a mutually agreed upon time and date that was conducive to his or her schedule. The subjects were given the option to participate in the interviews from their homes or any quiet place where they were able to provide appropriate responses. The interviews were audio-recorded using FreeConferenceCall.com. To protect the participants, physical notes will be kept in a locked drawer, and digital recording will be held in a password-protected computer. All recorded data stored in my personal computer will be deleted after 5 years from the date of the final study. The individual interview transcripts were automatically transcribed from the audio recordings. As stated earlier, the informed consent was provided both verbally and in writing to ensure that each participant understood that participation was voluntary, and each teacher could voluntarily withdraw at any point during the study.

Data Collection

Data collection is a necessary process when exploring the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with improved academic performance. I began data collection procedures with elementary content teachers using interviews to gain an understanding of their perceptions regarding their classroom ELL instructional practices (see Appendix B). The interview data were collected between May 2019 and January 2020. Each interview took place outside of school hours in a setting selected by the teacher for privacy. The interviews were scheduled for 1 hour, and each interview was recorded using FreeConferenceCall.com as an audio recording system. I informed the participants that I planned to take field notes during the interviews. The interview questions were designed to elicit the participants' perspectives and practices regarding their instructional practices of ELLs. I transcribed the interviews into a Microsoft Word Document within 24 hours of each session. I also collected lesson plans used by teachers in the classroom to support their responses. The feedback provided by the participants allowed any necessary changes to the transcripts before coding began.

Mack et al. (2011) stated that data collection in a case study usually takes the form of in-depth, one-on-one interviews with participants who have the knowledge to contribute to a specific issue. In-depth interviews are essential to understanding participants' thoughts and beliefs and are more useful than surveys at gaining a deeper understanding of these beliefs (Merriam, 2014). An ideal means of capturing the lived experiences of participants, according to Guest et al. (2013), is through a formant of

open-ended questions during the interview process. Qualitative researchers, who are engaged in the one-on-one interview process, collect data and ask probing questions one participant at a time (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). To ensure a thorough understanding of the participant's perceptions, probing questions are used as follow-up based upon the responses of participants (Hu et al., 2014). Semi-structured interviews allowed greater flexibility in obtaining additional data because I was able to ask probing questions.

Data Collection Instrumentation

Data collection instrumentation came in the form of semi-structured interviews and the review and analysis of lesson plans. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to use more latitude when wording and responding to interview questions (Merriam, 2014). To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the interview protocol (see Appendix B) was submitted to a panel of experts for review. All members of the panel were qualitative experts with over 15 years of experience. The second form of data collection instrumentation was the evaluation of lesson plans. The table used to collect data from the lesson plans (see Appendix D) was based on the Frequency of Instructional Methods developed to identify types of instructional methods utilized by school personnel (Lopez & Mason, 2017). This table included the types of instructional activities employed to meet school standards and learning objectives, which ensured valid data collection.

Sufficiency of instruments. The initial strategy of the data collection came from semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions

elicited responses from participants allowing the researcher to develop emerging themes during the interview process (Legard, Keegan, Ward, & Yeo, 2013). Semi-structured interviews helped provide full and in-depth responses to the research questions on what teachers perceived improved ELL academic performance. According to Merriam (2014), open-ended questions also help researchers construct new ideas. The interviews provided information about teachers' instructional practices and allowed participants to give their perceptions and expound upon their experiences (Creswell, 2014; Kvale, 2008). Semi-structured interviews are ideal for participants who are knowledgeable about their subject matter and who can share their perceptions easily. I composed open-ended questions to permit participants opportunities to respond in the least restrictive way, and for me to probe for deeper understanding. The chart used to align the interview questions with the research questions (Appendix E) was carefully developed using Chaparro's et al. (2015) Questions to Guide Instruction. This allowed me to gain a rich and deep understanding of the participants' perspectives and, thereby, obtain answers to the study's research questions.

The second strategy of the data collection consisted of lesson plans analysis. I requested teacher lesson plans from the individual participants via email. The data from the lesson plans provided a recurrent view of the objectives of lessons taught to ELLs by the participants. A review of the lesson plan documents was also conducted to triangulate the findings from interviews. As Hatch (2002) indicated, lesson plans are useful in providing evidence of teacher instructional strategies. According to Glesne (2011), lesson plans can be used to authenticate the instructional practices that teachers

use to support ELL learning (RQ 2). The use of lesson plans is also endorsed by Zhou and Xu (2017) who used lesson plans to gain a better understanding of teacher candidates' instructional practices. They used lesson plans to triangulate data with other data sources in their study. Teachers' lesson plans, according to Castro (2015), can identify the needs of ELLs based on their academic strengths and challenges. Lesson plans reflect the way teachers adopt instructional materials and how learning theory is translated into practice (Choy et al., 2013).

Process for how and when data are generated, gathered, and recorded.

Walden University partnered with an urban school district in the Midwest to investigate the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived to align with improved ELL academic performance. The data gathered were comprised of interviews and lesson plans from nine elementary content teachers. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the first phase of the data collection technique to answer the research questions. Each participant was interviewed one time, and a second interview was not required. Adding semi-structured interviews allowed me to focus on the purpose, goals, progress, and success of elementary content teachers' use of instructional practices that align with ELL academic performance. The interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes and teachers were aware they could ask for clarification if needed. During the interview, I used a system of member checking consisting of reflective follow-up questions. Telephone interviews were recorded and automatically transcribed into an audio file using FreeConferenceCall.com (Oates, 2015). I informed participants of the processes on the remote consent forms before conducting

the interviews. I prompted participants to respond to 12 interview questions. The interview questionnaire (see Appendix B) included a mix of questions to elicit information, opinions, thoughts, feelings, and impressions. The audio file was copied unto a word document and then uploaded in NVivo, creating an interview transcript for each participant.

Process for tracking data from instruments. Within the NVivo software, I recorded and tracked each interview (Lewis, 2015). Upon completion of the interviews, I converted the recordings by transcribing and reading the interviews (Creswell, 2013; Oates, 2015). I closed each interview by asking participants to provide a copy of their weekly lesson plans via email to answer research questions as the second phase of data collection; seven out of nine participants complied. I used a checklist to track and determine how teachers incorporated instructional practices to improve ELL learning. I created and kept individualized files for each participant on one flash drive. The data collected during the study was only used for the purpose of the project study. Lesson plan documents indicated several teaching methods to meet the varying learning styles of students. Additionally, lesson plan documents served as evidence of elementary content teachers' plan to provide instructional practices to meet the academic needs of ELLs. I was able to compare the information provided in the lesson plans to the information collected from the participants' responses to the interview questions.

There were no exit or follow-up interviews, but participants participated in member checking. Due to the nature of this exploratory case study and the subsequent data collection, all data were stored on electronic media, specifically, my personal

computer. Data were backed up on a flash drive and password protected. Following the conclusion of the study, data will be stored for a mandatory five years. Following the necessary wait period, all data will be deleted from the computer and the flash drive will be destroyed.

Procedures for gaining access to participants. To gain access to elementary content teachers, I completed an application form written to the district's review board. Once written IRB approval was granted, I sent a written request to research in the school district via email to the supervisor of program evaluation to obtain permission. The request included a detailed description of the study. Once I received district cooperation, I submitted the document to Walden University's IRB for final approval. Upon obtaining final approval (Walden IRB 05-17-19-0290825), I received notification from the districts' supervisor of program evaluation of the elementary schools willing to participate in my study. I sent an email to each principal, thanking them for their approval, and included a remote interview consent form for their review. I then sent emails to 101 potential participants from three elementary schools who met the selection criteria with an invitation to participate, using email addresses publicly listed on each school's website. Participants who met the selection criteria of elementary content teachers were asked to sign the consent forms electronically and return via email. If I did not receive a response from the potential participants after a 1-week duration, I sent them a follow-up email and invitation on a weekly basis. I repeated the process until a sample of nine elementary content teachers was met.

The interview consent form articulated the study's purpose, participant expectations, data collection procedures, and confidentiality methods. The interview consent form included a clear indication that their participation in the study was strictly on a volunteer basis and that their identity would remain confidential through encoding during the entire data collection and reporting process. Also included was contact information of the Walden University's representative if they had questions concerning the study. They then sent the invitation back via email with consent. Consenting participants received a follow-up email with a list of time slots to schedule a date for their telephone interviews. They were given the option of using their personal email for future contact if desired. If they were unable to meet during the time slots listed, I arranged to accommodate their schedules appropriately. Before each interview began, I explained to the participants their rights and provided an opportunity for the participants to ask questions.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher in this project study was to select and interview the participants, record the findings, document through audio, transcripts, and field notes, and analyze the data and the perceptions of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Merriam, 2009). I asked questions that helped answer the research question, sought to establish a good rapport with each participant, and interpreted the responses (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). I interviewed the participants, gathered all the data, organized the data, coded the responses, and identified emergent themes (Cho & Lee, 2014; Creswell, 2014).

I used emerging data themes to help understand what had been discovered as well as to indicate possible new directions for data collection.

At the time of the study, I had no relationship with the students, employees, or parents that are affiliated with the school of interest. I serve as the Minority Business Coordinator at a different public school district. Before this role, I served as a Supply Chain Manager for the district and taught first grade at a local private school. As such, there is no conflict of interest regarding my relationship with the potential participants.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was initiated by examining the questions developed before the interview and by using questions guided by the coding process. I used a priori coding aligned to the conceptual framework, then followed with open coding of all data collected, and finalized the coding process through axial coding to interpret the results of the interviews and lesson plans. Recorded interview transcriptions were downloaded and stored on my password-protected computer in a word document. Data from the word document were coded and analyzed within 24 hours of the interviews. The transcribed audio recordings in the word document were sent to the participants for their review. Returning the transcripts to the participants, confirmed the accuracy of the interview transcripts (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Only one of the participants submitted corrections from the transcripts.

A Priori Coding of Interview Data

During the first stage of the analysis, I read all the interview transcripts to familiarize myself with the data. In the first review, I did not write any notes or create

any codes; I familiarized myself with the data. Next, I reread each transcript. During the second reading of the data, I began to record my initial impressions. I used a priori codes which were based on the conceptual framework. The a priori codes consisted of the constructs of CRP: (a) academic success, (b) cultural competence, and (c) development of sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). I coded these constructs in each of the transcribed interviews. A different color was used to highlight each construct as an a priori code. I made notes in the margins of the transcriptions to interpret various details about the a priori (Lodico et al., 2013). For an example of this practice, see Koss (2015), who used a priori codes to identify patterns of diversity. A priori codes were helpful in identifying patterns and themes that align with the conceptual framework while encompassing the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs.

Open Coding of Interview Data

On the third reading of the data, I began looking for emerging codes. For stage two, I used open coding once a priori coding was completed to organize my findings according to the themes, which naturally emerged from the data (Cho & Lee, 2014; Creswell, 2014). When I reviewed the transcripts again, I copied and pasted the highlighted data into an Excel spreadsheet. In a qualitative study, the researcher analyzes the data by reducing the information into themes, which are made up of statements made most frequently by participants (Creswell, 2013; Holton, 2010). During the second level of coding, I displayed the interview transcripts using an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet allowed the transcripts to be easily and quickly evaluated by exhibiting the data by participant, school, and grade level. Next, after listening to tapes, I coded the

themes and concepts, eliminating redundancies (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). I then highlighted open codes using a different color to related themes that emerged from the transcripts. I then copied and pasted the open codes into another Excel spreadsheet. I compared a priori code with the open codes formulated from the data onto separate spreadsheets. The open coding was placed into categories that became themes.

Axial Coding of Interview Data

Then following open coding, axial coding involved generating categories and investigating possible connections found in the data (Merriam, 2009). I used axial coding to address the research questions by providing a picture of what instructional practices, from the perspective of the teachers, connect with the improved ELL academic performance. Once the categories became clear, axial coding was used to identify relationships within each category. The axial coding resulted in five themes which included cooperative learning strategies, varied instructional strategies, collaboration with ESOL teachers, language barriers, and a welcoming learning environment (see Appendix C). As an example, to develop the theme of varied instructional strategies, I included the CRP construct of academic success. From there, the findings from the data created categories that included the use of anchor charts, guided reading, hands-on, visual, and small group learning. The varied instructional strategies theme collapsed concepts that shared similarities. I was able to combine similar categories and collapse them into five main themes. The five themes reflected the feelings elementary content teachers had about instructional practices and their understanding of which practices aligned with improved ELL academic performance.

Lesson Plan Analysis

I requested one copy of a weekly lesson plan from each of the nine participants via email. Of the nine participants, seven complied with my request. Each lesson plan was numbered according to whom it belonged. For example, Participant 1's lesson plan was numbered "one," and Participant 2's plan was numbered "two." I studied each lesson plan and noted each type of activity that the teacher planned for the lessons. A sample of the seven lesson plans included key words and phrases that reoccurred. The reoccurring words and phrases included curriculum standards, academic language objectives, targeted instructional practices, and assessments to provide a systematic way for teachers to determine the focus, length, and teaching strategies used to facilitate student learning. As suggested by Yin (2014), I identified and recorded patterns as well as those activities aligned with the a priori codes. This procedure is supported by Ortiz and Davis (2019), who also analyzed preservice teachers' lesson plans, in the same way, to determine if they aligned with CRP tenets. They found that cultural competence was the least implemented among the three constructs of CRP.

Lesson plan documents served as evidence of elementary content teachers' plan to provide instructional practices to meet the academic needs of ELLs. I searched for keywords and phrases that identified teachers' instructional practices. I highlighted and coded reoccurring words and phrases. I organized the coded data on an Excel spreadsheet into categories to identify emerging themes. I then determined if the lesson plans supported the patterns identified. The emerging themes included the following types of activities: varied instruction, small group instruction, visual learning, cooperative

learning, and phonics worksheets. I used a lesson plan analysis (Appendix D) to illustrate participants' evidence of implementing ELL instructional strategies in their lesson plans. For instance, if varied instruction was used, I wrote down in my notes how they were used in the wording that the respondents used to identify the learning targets. Then, themes that developed from the activities were numerically coded and separated into emerging categories. I then analyzed the codes found in the data and compared them to information that originated in the participants' interview responses. Interview and teacher lesson plans were sufficient for data collection as both gave vital information from the participants. The data analyzed from the interviews and lesson plans provided a picture of what instructional practices, from the perspective of the teachers, connected with the improved ELL academic performance. During the interviews, most participants stated that they have tried to modify instruction to address the diverse learning needs of ELLs. However, their lesson plans authenticated that they did not design their lessons to accommodate ELL learners.

Evidence of Quality of Procedures

Qualitative researchers can increase the trustworthiness of study findings through member checking and triangulation. Member checking allows the researcher to verify participant responses by asking questions to clarify different aspects of the study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Member checking can reduce researcher biases to ensure that the participant's views are recorded accurately (Lodico et al., 2013). To enhance the internal validity of this study, member checking allows participants to determine the accuracy of the findings and to confirm that the researcher's interpretations

were fair and representative (Yin, 2014). Participants could review my initial results to ensure that their responses were not prejudiced by my biases (Lodico et al., 2013). Participants can make suggestions to ensure that their perspectives are fully captured during the member checking process (Merriam, 2014). Member checking provided me with the chance to corroborate participant perspectives and revise inaccurate findings. A system of member checking took place during each interview, where I restated and summarized the information to check for accuracy from each participant (Merriam, 2009). When member checking is performed, participants may contradict their original statements. By restating and summarizing participants' interview information, no contradiction of statements was found. To avoid making errors, researchers should carefully consider when and how member checking is used to prevent the adverse effects of participant bias (Livari, 2018). Another standard error researchers can make is not making allowances for researcher bias and, therefore, not recording participants' views adequately (Lodico et al., 2013). Soliciting feedback from participants through member checking allows participants to verify findings from the researcher's initial findings (Merriam, 2014). Member checking is an important strategy to ensure validity and reliability.

Another strategy used to determine the trustworthiness of study findings is through triangulation. Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2014) stated that triangulation could enhance the integrity of the study through corroboration data from multiple sources such as documents and interviews. Documents can complement findings and triangulate results when used with other qualitative research methods (Bowen, 2009). Triangulation

helps the researcher increase the credibility of the study by using various sources of data (Merriam, 2014). Triangulation will help improve the support of the findings of the study by comparing data from semi-structured interviews and lesson plans. (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). In this study, the triangulation process included data from semi-structured interviews and lesson plans. I analyzed the data and presented evidence to support the themes. Through strategies such as triangulation, researchers can bolster the credibility of the study.

Discrepant Cases

I addressed discrepant cases by looking for patterns found within the coding of the data. According to Lodico et al. (2013), identifying and analyzing discrepant data is a critical element of validity testing in qualitative research. Discrepant cases can also include data that are outliers or hold inconsistencies with the initially identified research questions, themes, or categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009). According to Braten and Braasch (2018), discrepant cases can also include data that come from the same research question but does not agree with the other data samples. Gast and Ledford (2014) contended discrepant cases can be identified as data that hold irregularities that disconfirm themes or categories found during the data analysis process. Those types of findings can enhance relevancy to the research project and provide information that add to how teachers perceive their instructional practices. All perspectives and possibilities were discussed in the research findings since some participants had differing perceptions of the same topic.

Data Analysis Results

The problem investigated in this study was the need to explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how the teachers perceive those practices to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. I investigated instructional practices taking place in the elementary school classrooms of ELL students of content teachers. Participants completed semi-structured interviews and submitted lesson plans. I used these data collection sources to analyze teacher perceptions and experiences. To locate evidence of themes, the process was guided by the following research questions:

1. What instructional practices do elementary content teachers say they use to support ELL learning?
2. What practices are perceived to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance?

The findings from the interviews were compared to those of the teachers' lesson plans. Themes emerged that were common to both the interviews and the lesson plans. The themes included cooperative learning strategies, varied instructional strategies, collaboration with ESOL teachers, language barriers, and a welcoming learning environment.

Review Process for When Data Were Generated, Gathered, and Recorded

I gathered data in the form of interviews and lesson plans for this study from elementary content teachers from three schools who work in a Mid-Atlantic school district. While aligning each interview question to the research question and the concepts

in the theory of CRP that support the conceptual framework, I interviewed each participant through semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B). The lesson plans were used to show evidence that weekly lesson plans that included instructional strategies promoted ELL learning. Because all participants were located in different states, I used FreeConferenceCall.com via telephone to automatically record and transcribe the interviews, which saved time, provided an accurate record of the conversations, and made it easy to code and categorize emerging themes (PR Newswire, 2019). Each semi-structured interview lasted between 27 and 48 minutes. Following each interview, I copied and pasted the transcribed audio recordings that related to each interview question into a word document. Before identifying themes, I generated codes that were condensed into overlapping categories in alignment with the research questions. Once the interview process was completed, I asked each participant to email a copy of their weekly lesson plans. Seven of the nine participants complied with my request. Lesson plan documentation included activities about the specific content that elementary content teachers expected their students to master.

Findings from the Problem and Research Question 1

The purpose of this doctoral project study was to explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived to align with improved ELL academic performance. I analyzed the interview and lesson plan responses to Ladson-Billings's (1995, p. 160) constructs of CRP (a) academic success, (b) cultural competence, and (c) development of sociopolitical consciousness. The findings provide an understanding of participants' perceptions of working with ELLs

and how they implemented instructional practices in mainstream classes (see Appendix C). Two findings emerged from the data analysis from research question one. First, participants stated that they use cooperative learning strategies to promote English language acquisition among ELLs. Second, participants reported they use varied instructional strategies to meet ELLs' academic needs.

Theme 1: Cooperative learning strategies. The first theme, which emerged from the overall interview responses of the participants, was to implement cooperative learning strategies that promote English language acquisition among ELLs. The analysis of interview data revealed that the participants believed cooperative learning strategies allowed ELLs to feel validated as essential members of mainstream classrooms when they share ideas (Toppel, 2015). Cooperative learning strategies are in alignment with Johnson and Johnson (2009), who indicated that cooperative learning is appropriate across all subjects and is considered one of the foremost instructional methods. In addition, Zarifi and Taghavi (2016) stated that cooperative learning has a positive influence on ELL grammatical competence and contributes to a nurturing and collaborative environment for ELLs.

Participants believed that cooperative learning strategies are essential instructional practices used to teach ELLs in the classroom, according to Participants 1 and 2. Participant 1 described how she employed cooperative learning strategies by “pairing an ELL student with low English proficiency with an ELL student who has high English proficiency.” She said it “allowed the ELL student with low English proficiency to feel more confident in sharing in the classroom because this strategy encourages students to

learn from each other.” Participant 2 shared that cooperative learning strategies, when used properly, encouraged “community building and relationships to help all students feel welcome and accepted and part of the classroom community.” Participant 4 commented on how the communication component with cooperative learning “helps all students but highlights the ELLs.” Also, Participant 3 added that,

I basically use the Kagan strategy that’s like the turn and talk. It’s really less work for me because they’re talking to each other and kids learn best from each other. They pick up things from the teacher, but when we want mastery of a subject and things like that, they learn best from one another.

Only Participant 7 incorporated cooperative learning strategies as part of her weekly lesson plan documentation.

Theme 2: Varied instructional strategies. A second theme that emerged from participant interview responses was teachers’ use of varied instructional strategies to meet ELL needs. The interview data revealed the participants believed that varied instructional strategies provided the proper support to enhance student performance. The findings are related to the conceptual framework of Ladson-Billings’s (1994) construct of academic success. The use of varied instructional practices is essential in meeting the academic needs of individual learners. Five of the nine participants used some form of varied instructional strategies that included small groups and multimodal approaches, such as graphic organizers, visuals, music, and gestures, and building on students’ prior knowledge to help make content understandable for ELLs (Thompson, 2015).

Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, and 9 used small group instruction, cooperative learning, and

visual learning and phonics worksheets in their lesson plans as a varied approach to learning. The findings align with Shaunessy-Dedrick et al. (2015), who explained that learning requires more than a one size fits all approach. Castro (2015) also advocated the use of varied instructional practices with ELLs. Varied or differentiated instruction, according to Valiandes (2015), helps to adapt instruction to meet the needs of ELLs. Last, Ismajli and Imami-Morina (2018) agreed, indicating that differentiated teaching is a useful tool that helps teachers gain knowledge to support the individual needs of ELLs. Teachers can develop varied learning activities that address culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

All but one of the participants stated that students need to be acquainted with varied instructional strategies that meet their individual needs. For example, participant 1 said, “We use small group instruction for guided reading, so students receive guided reading instruction from me, and ELLs will receive it on their level, and they get word work support as well as how to decode.” Participant 8 instructs ELLs who are “homogeneously grouped by their reading level.” Participants 1, 2, 3, and 9 also mentioned the importance and benefits of using visuals, which keeps students’ attention. Participant 3 indicated that, “I like to use a lot of visuals, so if we use the sentence strips or signs or highlighting anything that visually catches the eye.” Participant 1 said,

We use a lot of hands-on manipulatives which can help students show their understanding in other ways, so I really feel like as the primary teacher it does help me with teaching ELL students and helping them be successful in the classroom.

Six of the participants incorporated a variety of instructional practices that included visual learning, hands-on, and small group activities in their lesson plans to increase student learning.

Findings From the Problem and Research Question 2

Like research question 1, I analyzed the interview and lesson plan responses to the constructs of CRP. The findings provide an understanding of what practices elementary content teachers perceived to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. Three findings from research question two emerged from the data. First, participants stated that tapping into the expertise and cultural competence of ESOL teachers created a necessity to increase collaboration opportunities with ESOL teachers. Second, the participants said that parental involvement was one of the keys to improving academic performance. And finally, participants stressed the importance of creating a welcoming and stress-free learning environment for ELLs.

Theme 3: Collaboration with ESOL teachers. The participants believed that encouraging collaboration between ESOL and classroom teachers can support regular classroom instruction by taking advantage of ESOL teachers' expertise. This theme aligns with Babinski et al. (2018), who found that collaboration incorporating cultural competency in the classroom provides ESOL and elementary content teachers with the necessary skills to implement high-impact instructional methods. Also, Percy et al. (2015) found that collaboration between ESOL specialists and elementary content teachers support students by improving elementary content teachers' understanding of ELL learning capabilities and requirements. All the participants agreed that collaborative

activities provide the elementary content teacher and the ESOL teacher opportunities to combine their teaching methods. Hong et al. (2019) stated that this improves the learning outcomes of ELLs. According to Participants 1, 3, and 5, collaboration is especially beneficial in science and social studies, where it is more content-specific vocabulary that can be more challenging. Cho et al. (2019) concurred, and affirmed that students could achieve greater success when mainstream teachers and ESL teachers utilize collaboration by sharing ideas on progress and incidences.

According to Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9, teacher collaboration strategies with ESOL teachers assist ELLs who struggle in mainstream classes. Participant 4 described how

The ESOL teacher pulls out the students every day. My students are with her for 30 to 45 minutes and what I like about her is that she teaches every subject. I also like that she preloaded the lessons, so she's a week ahead of us, for example, my whole class is not learning magnets until next week, but she's teaching magnets this week in her ELL groups, so those kids already have the vocabulary when they come to me next Monday which is really awesome.

Participant 2 added, "In 1st grade, they get pulled out to receive small group instruction. The ESOL teacher does vocabulary building and reading and writing with them."

Participant 6 stated,

I think from my experience the ESOL teacher will also bring in an aide to spend one on one time with that child if they're really struggling and having problems. I

am also reaching out to other teachers to get ideas about different curricula and different things to help my ELLs get the needed exposure.

The findings align with the conceptual framework of Ladson-Billings (1995), which incorporates academic success and cultural competency into the classroom.

Collaboration allows teachers to learn new and innovative teaching practices and can extend their knowledge that may have a positive effect on how their students learn.

Theme 4: Language barriers. The participants shared that parental communication is necessary for the success of ELL students. Participants claimed that language and cultural barriers could often present communication difficulties between parents and teachers (Soutullo et al., 2016). This aligns with Reynolds et al. (2015), who stated that language differences as significant barriers to engaging families. Jefferson (2015) agreed and noted that the lack of easy access to school websites that typically contain information pertinent to families could serve as significant obstacles to parents. Language barriers also support research by Campbell et al. (2016), who stated poor communication between school and the home served as barriers to parental school participation as many parents who had a desire to become involved lacked the knowledge on how to do so. They concluded that schools might benefit from considering parents' perspectives in efforts to involve them in school participation better. Finally, See and Gorard (2015) stated that parental involvement in their child's learning is consistently linked with increased student achievement. Supporting parental engagement and breaking down language and culture barriers between home and school may be solutions stakeholders can use to enhance ELL student performance.

Many of the participants shared the same perception that one of the biggest challenges to effective ELL instruction is parental involvement. Participant 1 believed that proficiency in English is significant because many children of first-generation parents start school with fewer academic skills than do children of non-ELL students. Participant 2 stated that many ELLs are not encouraged to speak English at home by their parents. Teachers said that communicating with parents was difficult for them because of the language barrier. According to Participants 1, 2, 4, and 7, the language barrier at home became an obstacle when teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Participant 1 shared that she thinks, “The biggest challenge might be communicating with parents just because that is typically where there'll be more of a language barrier. This is especially true if the parents are non-English speakers.” A significant obstacle content teachers face in mainstream classrooms, according to Participant 2, is the “language barrier when it comes to communicating with parents.” Participant 7 commented that, “I think my biggest obstacle was communicating with parents.”

Theme 5: A welcoming learning environment. A fifth theme that emerged from the participants’ interviews was the importance of creating a welcoming and stress-free learning environment for ELLs. Creating a welcoming and stress-free learning environment is in alignment with Cody et al. (2016) who used a mixed-methods study to examine the instructional practices of teachers working with ELLs in elementary content classrooms. The teachers in the study used generic instructional strategies to accommodate ELLs rather than specific ELL strategies to facilitate a stress-free and welcoming learning environment. Cody et al. concluded that instruction should

specifically target ELLs' language and literacy development methods to create stress-free and a welcoming setting. A stress-free and welcoming learning environment, according to Samalot-Rivera et al. (2018), are classrooms where teachers take the time to learn about the different countries of origin for their ELLs. ELLs can also feel more welcomed and may be more willing to participate when instructional methods include culturally relevant music and games from the students' native country (Cruz & Petersen, 2011). Cervetti et al. (2015) advocated that ELLs are apt to feel more comfortable practicing their English-speaking skills when teachers acknowledge and validate their students' native language creating an inviting learning environment. Leveraging ELL native backgrounds can support the instructional strategies of elementary content teachers.

According to the perceptions of the participating teachers, a welcoming and stress-free learning environment makes ELLs more apt to focus on learning. One teacher commented that "First and foremost, when they come into my classroom, I make them feel welcome." She further stated that she's able to accomplish a welcoming environment,

By letting them know that whatever culture, whatever language they speak, all language or languages are also welcome. I thought my kids come in ashamed of their home language, and I try to sort of eliminating that thought process so then they'll be open to learning.

Another teacher stressed the importance of creating a learning environment in which ELLs feel accepted and welcome. She stated that,

Foremost, we focus on community building and relationships. This helps all students feel welcome and accepted, and part of the classroom community. This is something I really focus on, especially in the beginning of the year, and then once that's established, I feel like the real learning can take place.

A third participant, when asked 'What instructional practices are linked to improving the academic performance of ELLs?' stated that "a child learns best when a child feels welcome." She further stated that to create a welcoming environment, "I really have to be adept at the way they think and how the pace at which they pick things up because they do have to work at a slower pace."

Discrepant Cases

Analyzing discrepant cases involves examining the data that contradicts or negates something identified as familiar to the experiences of all participants (Merriam, 2009). I searched for discrepant cases as I coded my data from the interview transcripts. Discrepancies added depth and detail to participants' experiences (Lodico et al., 2010), while possibly reflecting their personal biases (Yin, 2014). For this research, discrepant cases were analyzed just like any other data. Although participants had similar experiences, challenges, and obstacles, there were only three responses that could be interpreted as a discrepant case. Participant 6, when asked if she faced any challenges in her classroom because of having ELLs in her class, out of the nine participants, she was the only participant that did not face any challenges and responded that she,

Didn't see that as any more of a challenge across the board whether it is with ELLs or any type of things in the classroom. There are always different

challenges that come across, so I don't see that as anymore of a challenge than any other thing or any other you know stuff in the classroom.

This participant was noted as a discrepant case because the opinion shared differed significantly from the other participants. Another discrepancy discovered during the interview analysis was one participant's response to the question: "Were there quality instructional resources available for you to use with ELLs to meet their literacy needs?" Participant 5 responded, "not really. I have to ask for them and or ask the right person." Finally, a discrepancy was also found when Participant 2 was asked her thoughts concerning varied instructional practices to address student learning style differences and stated,

There's been some research about learning styles that I haven't completely read through, but I've been hearing recently that learning styles are not really an issue. So, I'm not necessarily trying to make specific lessons for just students that might have more of a likeness to kinesthetic learning.

This participant was the only teacher who minimized the need to employ instructional methods to meet the learning styles of diverse learners. Those discrepancies did not alter the findings but solidified the need for a diversity training program to provide elementary content teachers the cultural competency to better understand and communicate with their ELL students. Nonetheless, overall, participants felt the need to improve their relationship with ESOL teachers. The teachers all felt the use of varied instructional materials was dependent on the needs of the students.

Evidence of Quality

The data analysis included the triangulation of the interviews, and the lesson plans to ensure validity. Triangulation is a research method that involves multiple sources to associate and examine the data collected from different sources (Merriam, 2009). The interviews, the examination of participant lesson plans, and member checking provided triangulation of data. Triangulation was a valuable method to establish confirmability and credibility of the research study's findings (Yin, 2014). I conducted participant interviews to identify how teachers implemented instructional practices for ELLs. Semi-structured interviews are needed to understand past events that cannot be replicated (Merriam, 2009). The lesson plan data indicated activities that include concepts and skills the participants expect their students to master. Glesne (2011) explained that using information gathered from interviews and lesson plans is appropriate in a case study method. The lesson plans served as further evidence that instructional practices for ELLs were being implemented in mainstream classrooms (Castro, 2015). The lesson plans were used to show proof that weekly lesson plans that included instructional strategies, which promoted ELL learning.

An additional augmentation to quality in the data analysis was the use of member checking. According to Amankwaa (2016), member checking is a credibility method used to establish legitimacy in research. Member checking provided me with the chance to corroborate participant perspectives and revise inaccurate findings. Member checking took place during each interview, where I restated and summarized the information to check for accuracy from each participant. Quality augmentation is supported by member

checking, according to Merriam, which involves asking participants if the translation of their interview statements is accurate.

Outcomes

This researcher intended to explore the instructional practices of elementary teachers of ELLs and how the teachers perceive those practices to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance and inform all stakeholders about a gap in practice between elementary content teacher ELL instructional practices and research-based ELL instructional practices. The questions addressed in this study were:

1. What instructional practices do elementary content teachers say they use to support ELL learning?
2. What practices are perceived to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance?

I analyzed the interview and lesson plan responses to Ladson-Billings's constructs of CRP (a) academic success, (b) cultural competence, and (c) development of sociopolitical consciousness. Included as part of this project deliverable, is a policy recommendation paper, which describes the rationale to address the problem, highlighted in the project.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the instructional practices of elementary teachers of ELLs and how the teachers perceive those practices to be aligned with improved ELLs' academic performance. The participants included teachers who have ELLs in their classrooms. The primary form of the data collection came from semi-structured interviews, and teachers' lesson plans to explore the

instructional practices of elementary teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with improved academic performance. I conducted interviews of teachers using FreeConferenceCall.com, which were tape-recorded and automatically transcribed. Furthermore, the data collected may be used to develop a project, which could be used for professional development/training instruction and material. Section 3 includes a description of the project, goals, rationale for selection, and how the problem was addressed, a literature review, a project evaluation plan, and project implications. I created a policy recommendation in the form of a white paper as a deliverable to generate a better understanding of what instructional practices elementary education teachers perceive to be aligned with improved ELLs' academic performance.

Section 3: The Project

This section is about the project study. I explored the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how the teachers perceive those practices to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. The project, a deliverable in Appendix A, consists of a policy recommendation paper with detail in which I provided policy recommendations on ELL instructional practices. What follows is a description of the goals, rationale, and limitations for the project. A review of the literature relevant to the project will also be presented along with a discussion of social change implications.

Description of the Project

A policy recommendation can disseminate research findings and recommendations to district policymakers to guide efforts to improve ELL instruction. According to Wong et al. (2017), a well-written policy paper includes the best available data to support a range of policy options while presenting a clear and specific purpose. A policy paper is a document containing a brief description of strategies that address a need within an organization and provide information to support policy (Lyons & Luginsland, 2014). Rillero and Camposeco (2018) used a policy paper to define, describe, and promote dialogue among stakeholders concerning the implementation of a problem-based learning experience. Policy papers disseminate information by offering insight into a solution for policy problems (Li, 2013). A policy paper can also be used to shed light on potential solutions (Stelzner, 2010), through pointed analysis and strategic policy recommendations (Young & Quinn, 2002). The policy recommendation included

actionable steps for improving the academic performance of ELLs using instructional best practices.

Goals of the Policy Recommendation with Detail

The goals of the policy paper were to report the findings of this study and provide recommendations to facilitate effective instructional practices that align with improved ELL academic performance. The findings of a policy paper can influence policy and help stakeholders make informed decisions (Breen, 2012). According to Sandelowski and Leeman (2012), informed decisions through research and evidence help ensure that stakeholders make the best decisions. Areas of policy recommendations include the instructional practices of teachers with ELLs. The policy recommendation goals justify the policy paper, which will help establish improved outcomes.

Rationale

The policy paper is an appropriate means to bring attention to elementary content teachers' perceptions regarding their ELL instructional practices. LaBelle (2017) used a policy paper to apply findings from a study of preservice teachers. The researcher used the paper to recommend program modifications and improvements to assist teachers in reflecting upon the political and moral implications of their teaching. A policy paper was also used by Rattan et al. (2015) to address student educational achievement through instructional practices. In the policy paper, they presented recommendations for improved student outcomes. Finally, Heineke et al. (2018) investigated ways to enhance access and equity for ELLs. These researchers presented their findings through a policy paper. Similarly, the contents of the current policy paper will address the major themes

that emerged during the study and the answers to the research questions. The policy paper will also contain a discussion of the recent literature concerning the perception of elementary content teachers regarding their ELL instructional practices.

The policy recommendation position paper aligns the outcomes of this study and provides the insight needed for an understanding of elementary content teachers' instructional practices of ELLs (Sakamuro & Stolley, 2010). It is an effective way to disseminate information using researched-based recommendations for those who are not directly involved in classroom teaching (Lumby & Muijs, 2014). Pershing (2015) contended that a policy paper uses facts and logic from research findings to support resolutions to the research problem. Campbell and Naidoo (2017) stated that policy papers deliver a specific viewpoint by including data to provide a synopsis from research-based studies. Thus, a policy paper serves as a practical method for problem-solving that stimulates positive social change (Malone & Wright, 2017). The policy recommendations addressed the problem because it contains suggestions that address the issue of low performing ELLs.

Review of the Scholarly Literature on Policy Papers

The problem I explored in this study concerned the need to explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how the teachers perceive those practices to be aligned with improved ELLs' academic performance. This need aligns with the findings for the research questions in my study. This literature review supported the purpose and necessity of developing a policy paper that met teachers' needs and concerns based on teachers' perceptions and experiences.

I reviewed scholarly literature related to the study's findings and project genre. Several resources informed this literature review. To identify prospective, peer-reviewed articles and books, I used Google Scholar and the following Walden Library databases: Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, ERIC, Thoreau, SAGE Premier, ProQuest Central, PsycINFO, and SocINDEX. The literature search primarily focused on literature, published in peer-reviewed journals within the last 5 years, using the following keywords and topics: *white paper*, *position paper*, *grey literature*, *white paper and writing*, *white paper and education*, and *writing a paper policy brief and policy recommendations*. All the articles included in this literature review were peer reviewed. This review of the literature provided context and structure for the content of my policy paper as the project genre. This section includes discussions on (a) how a policy paper is appropriate and (b) how theory and research support the content of the policy paper.

How a Policy Paper is Appropriate

Policy recommendations are appropriate to inform decision-makers that a change is necessary. James (2016) explained that a policy paper could alert stakeholders to possible problem areas and educate the importance that a policy change is needed. The researcher can use the format of a policy recommendation to promote a better understanding of the issue by influencing decision-makers to address the problem and offer solutions (Pershing, 2015; Sakamuro & Stolley, 2010). By providing solutions to a specific question, policy papers can be more appropriate than a regular report (Campbell & Naidoo, 2017). The findings of the policy recommendations helped support the

purpose of the policy paper, which was to influence decisions on instructional practices that enhance ELLs' academic performance.

A policy paper presents information in a way that is easily read and understood by stakeholders. Policy recommendations are designed to inform decision-makers based on facts and data (Pershing, 2015). By highlighting useful events and information, the findings of a policy paper help form a connection to a problem (Lumby & Muijs, 2014). A detailed policy recommendation can encourage critical players to use the data from this study to identify better methods to evaluate elementary content teachers' instructional practices (Firestone, 2014). The information provided in a policy paper is an efficient way to communicate the research objectives and provide recommendations for the study's problem.

Policy papers are used to recommend solutions to a problem. A policy paper contains necessary information about a problem and concludes with recommendations to address the problem (Ibrahim & Benrimoh, 2016). According to Gotschall (2016), a policy paper can be used to support specific questions or issues. Herman (2013) stated that the purpose of a policy paper is to recommend the best way to solve a problem. Points raised by the policy paper may be beneficial to the local school district, so the appropriate instructional practices are implemented from the recommendations from this paper.

How Theory and Research Support the Content of the Policy Paper

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the instructional practices of elementary teachers of ELLs and how the teachers perceive those practices to

be aligned with improved ELLs' academic performance. This doctoral study was guided by two research questions: (a) What instructional practices do elementary content teachers say they use to support ELL learning? (b) What practices are perceived to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance? Here, I summarize the first point of my policy recommendation and then explain how the findings from Section 2 support it. I will interpret the findings as they relate to the conceptual framework that guided this study. Finally, I will explain how previous research findings support the policy recommendation.

The content of my policy paper is based on the findings from my data collection and analysis. Two findings relate to the instructional practices of elementary content teachers and how those practices were aligned with improved ELLs' academic performance. One was collaboration between elementary content teachers and ESOL teachers; the other was parental involvement as one of the keys to improved academic performance. My three recommendations are based on the findings that include district-level communication and collaboration, employing strategies to increase parental involvement, and developing a diversity training program. The recommendations of the current study were consistent with Ladson-Billings's CRP theory, which is that intervention strategies must be implemented for students to succeed academically. The data from the findings from Section 2 confirmed the strong link between CRP and academically successful ELLs. Ladson-Billings stressed the importance of students achieving academic excellence, and cultural competence aligning with the policy recommendations. CRP theory provides the basis to understand the many dynamics that

must be considered when designing effective instructional practices to meet the learning needs of ELLs.

District-level communication and collaboration. My first recommendation based on the findings of this study is to implement strategies that improved collaboration between elementary content and ESOL teachers through district-level communication and collaboration. Collaboration with ESOL teachers plays an important role when determining what practices and programs can assist ELLs who are struggling in mainstream classes. Most of the participants felt that implementing collaboration with ESOL teachers was significant and beneficial for increasing the academic performance of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. However, when asked whether they face any challenges because of having ELLs in their class, Participants 2, 3, 4, 7, and 9 stated that they struggled because their ELLs are pulled out of class by ESOL teachers. Although elementary content and ESOL teachers collaborated to support the learning needs of ELLs, factors, such as inadequate planning time and insufficient professional training, hindered them from consistently employing collaboration techniques in mainstream classrooms. Even participants who felt that increased collaboration was helpful still thought they had to work a little harder to manage their classrooms.

The partnership between elementary education teachers and ESOL teachers aligns with current research. Mundschenk and Fuchs (2016) recommended teacher collaboration to improve ELL academic success. Prelli (2016) also recommended teacher collaboration because it provides additional opportunities for teachers to learn appropriate practices applicable to their students. However, the struggle still exists. “This year, the

pullouts have been a lot,” one teacher explained, “so sometimes I felt like my ELLs were missing my phonics block of time.” She further stated that “The biggest challenge I think is as a teacher, you have to learn how to manage your time.” Building relationships through collaboration, suggested Jao and McDougall (2016), can enhance teacher knowledge by improving effective teaching practices. Another teacher remarked, “There’s an ESOL teacher coming into the classroom for support and which requires a challenge for me since my ELLs are getting pulled out. So, it’s difficult trying to balance that schedule all the time”. Collaborative activities, as sanctioned by Johnston and Tsai (2018), also produced co-planning for struggling ELL students. These activities provide the elementary content and the ESOL teachers opportunities to combine their teaching methods.

I recommend that district administration provide one full in-service day, per quarter, to allow elementary content and ESOL teachers to communicate, collaborate, and learn from one another in efforts to improve ELL learning. This in-service day should be focused on the needs of ELLs aligned with district student achievement goals. This can be done through coordinated planning sessions under the guidance and direction of the school principal. Elementary content and ESOL teachers can coordinate training sessions to emphasize opportunities to collaborate in culturally relevant co-teaching activities. In alignment with Ladson-Billings’s conceptual framework, instructional practices that seek to make instruction relevant and engaging by leveraging students’ backgrounds can encourage academic success in the classroom (Cole et al., 2016). Proponents of CRP view academic success as students achieving academic excellence and empowerment due

to teacher instruction. Ladson-Billings (2014) stated that educators should collaborate to decide the best methods to instruct each student. The collaboration will allow ESOL teachers a chance to transfer knowledge to elementary content teachers on how to teach ELL students effectively. As one first grade teacher explained,

Our ELL teacher meets 30 or 45 minutes a day daily, so she gets to know them, and we are able to work together. I've actually had the opportunity to also collaborate with our ESOL teacher and work on units together where she is preteaching vocabulary in her room, and students are coming into my room better prepared to learn about the information. That's especially helpful with science and social studies where it's more content-specific vocabulary that can be more challenging.

Mandel and Eiserman (2015) found that ESOL and classroom teachers can learn and grow in their teaching practices together. As a result, students are coming into mainstream classrooms better prepared to learn. They summarized that teacher collaboration was especially beneficial in science and social studies where it is more content-specific vocabulary that can be more challenging. Kirchhoff (2015) recommended that students can achieve greater success when elementary content teachers and ESOL teachers utilize collaboration by sharing ideas and resources. Collaboration, as one teacher described, is “also like having an ESOL teacher in the class co-teaching throughout the day so that it's not all the time you know you talk, like a support group.” Collaborative teaching, recommended DuFour et al. (2016), allow teachers to share experiences they have in the classroom and become the crux of a thriving learning

community. "In first grade, they get pulled out to receive small group instruction," explained one teacher. Another teacher commented that,

The ESOL teacher does vocabulary building and reading and writing with them. I provide small group reading instruction and really any type of remediation that they might need. If I find a student struggling in something, I reteach them in a small group just to make sure that they understand it, and then if any student needed extra visual support or more language support, I would provide that for them.

Chapman (2014) further recommended that teachers who collaborate can improve instructional strategies in the school. Team members become stronger by sharing ideas to maximize student learning.

Employing strategies to increase parental involvement. A positive correlation has been linked between ELL parental involvement and ELL students' higher test scores, increased motivation, and higher reading achievement (Calarco, 2016; Parsons & Shim, 2019). To enhance student performance, Niehaus et al. (2017) endorsed finding ways to increase parental involvement. Parents of low performing students may feel uncomfortable in school settings. According to Case (2016), this discomfort is because of the cultural communication barriers that exist between parents and teachers. Using CRP methods, schools can break down communication and language barriers by employing cultural competence strategies that recognize family values, backgrounds, and traditions as strengths (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Forming cultural competence, according to Ladson-Billings, requires incorporating positive cultural identities that engage parents,

and bridge the gap between home and school cultures (Hogan-Chapman et al., 2017). Parents can add a deeper understanding of students' cultures by providing valuable input (Kourea et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Therefore, it is helpful to employ activities that encourage parents to engage in events that promote positive learning practices with their children (Hindin et al., 2017). Vera et al. (2017) sampled 329 parents of ELLs and found that perceived language barriers were a significant predictor of decreased parental involvement. The investigation determined the reasons why parents might not be involved, factors that promote engagement, and parents' educational ambitions for their children. Rossetti et al. (2018) also advised increased communication between teachers and parents of ELL to improve students' attendance, behavior as well as academic achievement. Supporting parental engagement and breaking down language and communication barriers between home and school are recommendations for stakeholders to enhance ELL student performance.

It is recommended that teachers provide bilingual written documentation to parents of ELLs to improve communication between themselves, students, and parents. Parental support allows children to develop literacy skills before children enter school for the first time. Carroll (2017) affirmed that parental involvement in reading enables children to become familiar with the reading process, which in turn supports their children's literacy development at home. Teachers who provide bilingual written documentation to parents of ELLs can improve communication between themselves, students, and parents (Samalot-Rivera et al., 2018). Improved communication may compel parents to become more engaged in their child's learning process.

Creating a diversity training program. My third recommendation based on the findings of this study is to implement a diversity training program to create a stress-free and welcome learning environment for ELLs. Consistent with Ladson-Billings's theory of CRP, the development of a diversity training program will provide elementary content teachers the cultural competency to better understand and communicate with their ELL students. Cultural competence commented Ladson-Billings (1995), no matter the ethnic background, should be part of the classroom experience for students to achieve academic success. Completing a diversity training program, according to Schwartz (2019), will allow teachers to better communicate with students and parents of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Practical diversity education courses provide participants an opportunity to look at their own cultural bias as it relates to their ethnically diverse classrooms (Cardona-Molto et al., 2018). Teachers are better able to understand the perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse students and approach learning from their viewpoint when a healthy level of cultural competence is achieved.

It is recommended that a diversity training program will be completed on an annual basis by elementary content teachers to provide cultural competency to better prepare elementary content teachers to aide in the success of all students, especially ELLs. The purpose of the training would be to create a stress-free and welcoming learning environment through the integration of culturally competent course content into elementary content teachers' instructional practices (Cardona-Molto et al., 2018; Parsons & Shim, 2019). Participants' responses indicted they desired professional development that focused on employing a variety of culturally relevant instructional practices to

improve their professional growth for educating ethnically diverse students within mainstream classrooms. A diversity training curriculum and workshops would be aligned with the districts' strategic goal to increase student performance for all students, notably underperforming ELLs.

Project Description

This project is a policy recommendation paper that provides a better understanding of what instructional practices elementary content teachers say they use to support ELL learning and what practices are perceived to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. It was a modified policy analysis to enhance and provide a better understanding of the instructional practices at the local school district based on perceptions of teachers. The project provided the background of the existing problem that the local school district faced with underperforming ELLs. Also, the summaries of the study's findings based on the case analysis are provided. The policy recommendation supported significant evidence from both literature and research on how CRP strategies are being represented in the classroom to enhance ELLs' academic performance. To realize the implementation of the recommended procedures, I delivered the findings to the appropriate district stakeholders.

Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders

I will be responsible for developing and delivering the policy paper to the local districts' supervisor of program evaluations. I developed this position paper in response to a gap in practice between elementary content teacher ELL instructional practices and research-based ELL instructional practices. My role is to present the findings in the form

of a position paper. I will also distribute a summative evaluation form to the participants for their completion after reviewing the policy recommendation.

Project Implementation

The goal of this project study was to produce a policy paper on the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived to align with improved ELLs' academic performance. I prepared a policy paper for the district that contained the results of the study and recommendations for improvement. After approval from Walden University, I forwarded the policy recommendation to district stakeholders. Sharing the results of the study helps stakeholders to make an informed decision (Cairney et al., 2016; Makofane, 2018). A copy of the policy paper was also distributed to the school districts' supervisor of program evaluation. I included a description of the study and asked the supervisor of program evaluation to notify me upon receipt of the policy paper.

Project Evaluation Plan

An evaluation report is an appropriate deliverable for this project, which has the goal of increasing stakeholder awareness and offering the school district a new direction in the form of improved instructional practices. As part of the outcomes-based project evaluation plan, I developed an online survey via Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>) to collect feedback from recipients of the policy paper using a Likert-Style question format. An outcomes-based evaluation will allow for me to compare the study's data to future input from stakeholders. This feedback will help me determine the effectiveness of the policy recommendations implemented because of this

project (Ansari & Usmani, 2018). Collecting data electronically from the study allowed for ease of completion and an expedited rate of return for the participant (Cleary et al., 2014; Creswell, 2003). This permitted survey feedback on the recommendations provided in the policy paper. Personal and private data were protected by Survey Monkey, which disabled IP address tracking, and used the secure transmission to protect the exchange of individual data. Mohammed (2018) used a similar survey to help identify the effectiveness of current practices that supported special education students. The input helped teachers understand and tailor instructional presentations for student learning. To improve data reliability, transparency, and program effectiveness, program implementers employed feedback measures to help prevent possible conflicts of interest arising in the evaluation process (Pickering et al., 2017). To elicit feedback, I will email the project surveys to stakeholders (i.e., district-level and school personnel) of the schools of study. Responses from this evaluation were used to determine if the information in the policy recommendation was easy to understand and relevant.

Project Implications

The positive implications of the policy paper project at the local community level include increased awareness of the instructional practices used by teachers with ELLs in their classrooms. Effective instructional models for ELLs can help ELLs achieve academically and attain higher levels of English proficiency (Vogt & Echevarria, 2015). Evans (2018) stated that effective instructional models for ELLs could be delivered through teacher education programs. The instructional models should have the goals of preparing elementary education teachers to become productive with ELLs. The social

change implication may include the potential of providing researchers and institutions a better understanding of instructional practices, which will inform academic improvement efforts for ELLs.

Importance to Stakeholders in a Larger Context

Although I developed the policy paper project in the context of a specific school district, other stakeholders may benefit from the project. The study may contribute to positive social change by providing researchers, institutions, and school districts with a better understanding of the instructional practices of content elementary teachers with ELLs. Equipping elementary content teachers with effective instructional methods help support the learning needs of ELLs (Bautista, 2014). A better knowledge of instructional methods and their perceived linkage to the improved academic performance of ELLs may help prepare elementary content teachers to teach ELLs (Feiman-Neimser, 2018). The findings and recommendations from the study may be transferable. To ensure transferability, I used supportive documentation, vivid details, detailed, thick descriptions, and verbatim quotes from the participants to describe the findings. According to Merriam (2009), when researchers provide detailed explanations, the results become more realistic and valuable. The resulting project deliverable from this study will generate a better understanding of what instructional practices elementary education teachers perceive to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance.

Conclusion

Section 3 contains a discussion of the project study's goals, rationale, and review of the literature. It also includes the analysis of elementary content teachers' interviews

and the study's implications for social change. Section 4 contains a discussion of the project study's completion, strengths, limitations, policy recommendations, and scholarship. The latter part of this section consists of the projects' potential for social change implications, applications, and direction for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In this policy recommendation with a detailed project, I make a connection between elementary content teachers' instructional practices and what they say that supports ELLs' learning. The purpose of this policy recommendation was to inform stakeholders about the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived to align with improved ELL academic performance. Data collection was done through semi-structured interviews with elementary content teachers. The study was conducted to gain an understanding of what instructional practices elementary content teachers say they use to support ELL learning and what practices are perceived to be aligned with improved ELLs' academic performance. Ladson-Billings's theory of CRP was used to guide its development. I reviewed the literature on ELL instructional practices and used other researchers' findings of this study to determine the direction for elementary content teachers' instructional practices of ELLs. During the literature review, I also focused on emerging themes from the study findings to help address the identified gaps in elementary content teachers' instructional practices of ELLs that the participants shared. Based on the results of the study, I concluded that a policy recommendation paper would initiate discussion among stakeholders and address the learning needs of ELLs.

Project Strengths and Limitations

This policy recommendation provides insight for stakeholders to understand the challenges that elementary content teachers of ELLs face in mainstream classrooms. In this project, I highlight the strengths of how instructional practices are currently being

conducted. I also point out the limitations of this study. The project deliverable will provide stakeholders with evidence for their claim that increased collaboration can assist ELLs who are struggling in mainstream classrooms. Additional research should be conducted to understand further the intricacies of the working relationship between mainstream and ESOL teachers.

Project Strengths

The strength of this policy recommendation with a detailed project was that it offered evidence to suggest that increased collaboration with ESOL teachers was beneficial in assisting ELLs who were struggling in mainstream classes (Hong et al., 2019; Peercy et al., 2015). The participants of this project almost unanimously stated that collaboration was vital to ELL academic success in the classroom. For the local district, the data from my research provides an understanding of what instructional practices elementary content teachers say they use to support ELL learning and what practices are perceived to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. One main strength of this project is providing much needed instructional and collaborative strategies for elementary content and ESOL teachers (Young et al., 2016). An additional strength of the policy recommendation is that the data, which are derived from local research, suggest a need for further research in this area of scholarship.

Included as part of this project deliverable is a policy recommendation paper, which describes the rationale to address the problem highlighted in the project. The recommendations were developed after carefully analyzing the findings to identify what instructional practices improve ELLs' learning (Merriam, 2009). In developing these

recommendations, I drew from Babinski's et al. (2018) assertion that collaboration among ESOL and elementary content teachers can support regular classroom instructional practices. I also considered Cho's et al. (2019) suggestion that when mainstream and ESOL teachers share ideas, ELL students can achieve greater success in the classroom. These scholarly confirmations strengthen the foundations of this project and provide reasonable justifications for proposing a positive change to the existing ELL instructional practices of content teachers.

Project Limitations

This study includes several strengths, but there are also limitations. First, the study only included elementary content teachers without exploring the viewpoint of ESOL teachers. In my informal discussions with ESOL teachers, they were able to explain the benefits of collaboration from their experiences and some of the innovations and hindrances they encountered from mainstream teachers (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Another limitation was the small sample size that was only located in one part of the United States, which may not be sufficient to understand the depth of the problem (Merriam, 2014). Larger sample sizes in future studies with the same design and analysis may yield different results (Morse, 2015). Finally, a possible limitation is the acceptance of the policy papers' recommendation by the school district. The districts' stakeholders may disagree with the study and, therefore, may choose not to implement the recommendations.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The problem identified in Section 1 of this study focused on the need to explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how the teachers perceive those practices to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. I chose a policy recommendation with a detailed project to provide stakeholders with multiple solutions to a perceived problem (Pershing, 2015). An alternative plan for this study would have been a series of professional development workshops, which would have offered content teachers with opportunities to collaborate and generate more ideas and addressed the problem of limited knowledge about ESOL processes and teachers' misconceptions about ELLs. Professional development workshops would also have allowed for discussion of the issue of strategies that work for ELLs and how to engage with ELLs effectively (Prelli, 2016). Instead of a policy recommendation, another approach to solving the perceived problem is to develop a curriculum plan, which could provide an example of how teachers could implement the ESOL-centered instructional use from the viewpoint of ESOL teachers. However, to achieve this, the local district may need to redesign the school week to create a time for collaboration between content teachers and ESOL teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2015). This would allow the proper setting to develop the skills required for effective instructional practices for ELLs. Likewise, similar workshops will need to occur between parents and ESOL and content teachers by employing methods to increase parental engagement. To provide an alternative solution to the local problem, a different project could have also been developed. One possible alternative would have been to design a professional

development policy to train teachers on ways to implement an ESOL centered teaching style and instructional practice.

Scholarship Project Development, and Leadership and Change

In researching this policy recommendation with a detailed project, I have learned about scholarship, the importance of meticulous research, and how to present that information to stakeholders (Makofane, 2018). The entire research process and subsequent development of the policy recommendation position paper taught me valuable critical thinking skills and afforded considerable professional and academic growth (Patanapu et al., 2018). When I first began the program, I would have addressed the concern differently, probably with little data analysis and few data-based decision-making strategies (see Jaffe, 2016). Additionally, having experience as a teacher who never taught ELLs, I was educated by listening to the challenges participants faced with ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Conducting this study has increased my understanding and appreciation of the importance of how collaborating might have positive implications on ELLs' learning. As a scholar, I learned through the literature review and the data analysis process how to read, analyze, and interpret information critically. What I lacked in research experience techniques and procedures, I made up for in passion for finding solutions to increase ELL academic performance through improved instructional practice. Walden University offers vast resources in multiple formats, and I took advantage of most of them. The more knowledgeable I became about research, and the more I pursued different instructional methods to increase student performance among ELLs struggling in mainstream classrooms, the more this project study became my motivating force.

Finding new peer-reviewed resources relating to effective instructional practices of teachers with ELLs was extremely difficult. There is a significant gap in the literature concerning what instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs employ and how those teachers perceive those practices to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. However, finding these gaps was a part of the research process and helped me to mature as a practitioner. Although there is a gap in the literature concerning the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs, I was able to find many scholarly articles on instructional tools to improve ELL learning. By way of the literature review and the research problem, I began to piece together a narrative based on the input of the participants at the study sites during the process of data collection and analysis.

After I had finished gathering the data, I prepared the analysis of raw data by using NVivo, a qualitative analysis software tool. The analysis phase consisted of careful coding, recording, transcribing, pattern searching, creating categories, and finally deciding the themes (Lewis, 2015). In the process, I learned that qualitative research strategies of triangulation are essential in conveying authenticity. Triangulation includes combining all the data from all the participants via lesson plans, semi-structured interviews, and member checking. Triangulation is a research method that involves more than one source to compare and analyze the data collected from different sources (Merriam, 2009). Before and after I collected the data, I also had to be mindful of my own biases or interpretations in relating a message of trust and credibility to the sample participants. As a project developer, my goal was to present a list of data-driven recommendations to an

audience of stakeholders from one local school district. As I developed my policy recommendation paper, I studied the data analysis, formulated recommendations, conducted a literature review, and wrote my project. My research-based recommendations are measurable, actionable, and adequate. I used the University's planning tools and resources to look ahead and anticipate difficulties. Through the guidance of my committee chair, I learned to follow the rubric to reference and stay on task. I will forward the policy recommendation to district stakeholders who have the authority to make instructional practice alterations (see Harris & Sullivan, 2018). A copy of the policy paper will also be distributed to the school districts' supervisor of program evaluation. My final evaluation will come when I present the project to the school.

My passion and professional goal is to create equitable educational opportunities for all students. Developing my project proposal was a challenging and difficult process to the point that, at times, I doubted my scholarly ability. Initially, the study involved consultation with my doctoral committee, in-depth research, and critical thinking about other options. I was able to watch a project go from data analysis to a policy paper with recommendations. Setting up the interviews with the prospective participants was laborious as several emails eventually produced a sufficient sample size for the study (Merriam, 2014). All the interviews were conducted using FreeConferenceCall.com. Data transcription was cumbersome and time-consuming. In the qualitative analysis of the data, several themes emerged based on the responses of the participants (Cho & Lee, 2014). To optimize the foundation for positive social change intended for this project study, a policy paper was deemed appropriate in the form of recommendations to be

present to the local school district. I researched all the sections of the project that fellow scholars' findings supported. The program evaluation project was a direct extension of the study, and it was planned from the development of the research questions. As part of a project evaluation plan, a web-based survey application was completed using Survey Monkey for stakeholders to gather feedback on the white paper for evaluation and input after the presentation (Survey Monkey, 2012). To elicit feedback, I will email the project surveys to stakeholders of the schools of study. Responses from this evaluation were used to determine if the information in the policy recommendation was easy to understand and relevant.

The process of creating a scholarly work through collaboration with my committee chairs' support offered me a model of leadership and commitment I hope to model through the rest of my career as a scholar-practitioner. My committee chair guided me back to the literature and the scholarly process throughout this project. Not only was I applying what I was learning, but my committee chairs' example of leading and serving showed me how I could become a role model for others (Marx, 2006). Through the guidance and example of my chair, I learned that I could have an impact in my local community as a scholar-practitioner who uses data-driven techniques to identify problems, examine current literature for solutions, and develop meaningful change (Merriam, 1998). Within the field of education, the landscape is ever-evolving because of changing demographics, sociopolitical pressures, technological advances, and socioeconomic diversity (Howard & Rodriguez-Scheel, 2017). These factors require educational leadership that initiates positive change. I used leadership skills modeled by

my committee chair to engage with other civic leaders such as clergy and executive staff members of community organizations to present the data and recommendations to change the direction of a local school district. I will continue to use the skills I learned to serve my local community, which will help to accomplish my goal of being an advocate to the voices of the underrepresented.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The research that I have conducted offers a solution to the problem the study site district had concerning the academic underperformance of ELLs compared to their non-ELL peers. Many schools across the United States have the same problem. At the local setting, 37% of ELL reading scores and 31% of ELL math scores in Grades 3 – 8 scored as “failing” in the Standards of Learning standardized testing program (VDOE, 2018).

The importance of this project addresses the problems that come with diversity at a local level but draws attention to the more significant issue nationally. In this study, I provided some analysis of elementary content teachers’ instructional practices of ELLs.

Throughout my journey at Walden University, I have grown in my thinking, writing, and research. I am now more conversant with conceptual frameworks and research studies about instructional practices designed to improve the academic performance of culturally and linguistically diverse learners (de Araujo, 2017). I hope to increase my role as an agent of change and my impact on creating a level playing field for marginalized students. My research has helped me understand the challenges and opportunities that elementary content teachers of ELLs face in their classrooms (Hall & Graziano, 2017). Through the continuously repeated actions of rewriting, correcting, proofreading, and

revisions, I have learned the importance of pedagogical resources and tools on student outcomes.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This study provides findings regarding the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived to align with improved ELL academic performance. Therefore, the study's findings and proposed policy recommendation paper can promote positive social change and provide insights into how local districts with ELLs who struggle in mainstream classrooms can incorporate collaboration between parties connected with improving ELL learning. Implications for further research might include the need to study the instructional practices of elementary content teachers through the lens of ESOL teachers (Hong et al., 2019). ESOL teachers are assigned to work with content teachers to improve ELL academic performance, and it would be meaningful to collect data based on their relationships with content teachers (Percy et al., 2015). In this project, a position paper with a policy recommendation, I suggested the benefits of improved collaboration between elementary content and ESOL teachers (Babinski et al., 2018). If accepted by the study site elementary schools, it will be implemented in K5 – fifth-grade classrooms to help ELLs attain academic achievement. The deliverable, the policy paper, was circulated to the districts' leadership team. If the group accepts it, the strategies can be implemented in classrooms in the next school year. The advent of proper professional development may open avenues for those who struggle with English proficiency.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include a better understanding of what instructional practices elementary content teachers say they use to support ELL learning and what practices are perceived to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. The growing ELL student population makes it paramount for school districts to create positive social change by implementing effective instructional practices (Pappamihel & Lynn, 2016). The results of the study provide information that may help education policymakers and administrators gain an understanding of how to communicate better and facilitate the implementation of instructional practices as related to ELL learning (Breen, 2012; Pershing, 2015). Likewise, elementary content and ESOL teachers may also gain a better understanding of how to effectively collaborate based on the insights and recommendations of the participants of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

In this study, I concentrated on elementary content teachers' perceptions regarding their ELL instructional practices. A couple of themes emerged during the analysis of data that should be studied in more depth. The participants of the study agreed that collaborative activities provided the elementary content teacher and the ESOL teacher opportunities to enhance their teaching methods (Mundschenk & Fuchs, 2016). Some even expressed that the academic achievement of ELLs was dependent on the input of ESOL teachers. Elementary content teachers also discussed the frustration that came from ESOL teachers pulling ELLs in and out of their classrooms. Therefore, the addition of teacher training programs that include ESOL teaching strategies should be studied,

especially when it comes to preparing content elementary teachers to teach ELLs (Johnston & Tsai, 2018). Another theme that emerged from the data was finding a way to improve parental communication to enhance ELL learning (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014). The research participants were limited to elementary content teachers of ELLs. Future research could be expanded to include middle and high school teachers of ELLs. Expanding the study to a broader population will provide a more elevated perspective about what instructional practices are used to improve ELL learning. Future research of this topic should include exploring the impact of content teachers' instructional practices from the perspective of ESOL teachers. Expanding the research parameters to include ESOL teachers' viewpoints could provide a global look at the data from both sides to compare. To increase sustained learning among educators, future research could also focus on training elementary content teachers on ELL instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2015). I was concerned about the attitude toward the ELL students. Some of the participants had no idea how to reach level one ELLs who were nonresponsive to teachers' communication attempts. All the recommendations mentioned above for further research will add to the growing body of research on teachers' instructional practices of ELLs.

Conclusion

The findings of my study highlighted the importance of elementary content teachers' perceptions regarding their ELL instructional practices. In Section 4, the strengths and limitations of the study, as well as recommendations, were explained. In this section, I detailed reflections as a scholar and practitioner, and I reflected on the

experience of developing the project (Schmitt, 2016). I discussed the implications of the project and presented recommendations for further research. I highlighted how my policy recommendation with detail was relevant to today's mainstream classrooms. The future impact of this research goes beyond the ELL students of this study. Elementary content teachers meet challenges daily from the problems that come with increased diversity from various cultural groups. Yet, the growing achievement gap between ELLs and Non-ELLs implies instructional practices are insufficient in closing the academic achievement gap for ELLs. Research questions were crafted to understand the instructional practices of elementary teachers of ELLs and how the teachers perceive those practices to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. Through the lens of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995), data were collected and analyzed to investigate the challenges and obstacles elementary content teachers faced while employing effective instructional practices to ELLs in mainstream classes. Applications of this study's findings may provide insights into how local school districts with ELLs who struggle in mainstream classrooms can incorporate collaboration between parties connected with improving ELL learning. Through practices to engage elementary content and help ESOL teachers diminish communication barriers between teachers and parents and introduce diversity training programs, district leaders can contribute to positive social change for ELL students through improved teacher instructional practices of ELLs.

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Appendix A: Policy Recommendations for Elementary Content Teachers' ELL

Instructional Practices

Walden University

A Policy Recommendation Paper with Detail

by

C. Wesley Owens

Policy Recommendations for Elementary Content Teacher's ELL Instructional Practices

Introduction

The increasing diversity of student populations has presented unique challenges for teachers who instruct ELLs in their classrooms. Teachers work with students who are faced with the dual task of attaining academic knowledge while overcoming linguistic barriers (Perez & Kennedy, 2014). These barriers often require teachers to make instructional accommodations in the classroom to assist ELL academic performance (Pappamihiel & Lynn, 2016). As student populations become increasingly diverse in public schools and the achievement gap between English Language Learners (ELLs) and English-speaking students continue to grow, researchers, lawmakers, and school district personnel seek ways to increase student performance. According to Schulz et al. (2014), teachers are challenged to construct cultural bridges to link students' home and school lives to enhance academic achievement. The problem, in a Virginia school district, is a need to explore the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. A gap of practice exists at the local level where, according to the school districts' supervisor of program evaluation, there is not a clear understanding of which instructional strategies are being used in the classroom. This dynamic points to an apparent gap between best practice and existing practice.

The purpose of the policy recommendation paper is for me to offer suggestions on how to support elementary content teachers with ELLs. The policy recommendations will provide best practice suggestions, derived from current scholarly literature of the

instructional practices of elementary content teacher experiences in the K – 5 academic setting. I constructed the study's conceptual framework based on Ladson-Billings's (1995) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy which, was rooted in the theoretical tenets of Vygotskian theory of social and cognitive construction originated in the 1990s from research on educational inequity of ethnically diverse students (Vygotsky, 1978).

According to Ladson-Billings (1995) "culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions; (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and; (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160). In this policy recommendation, I will offer suggestions to improve the instructional practices of elementary content teachers with ELLs as perceived by the nine participants in this study.

Research Design

I undertook an exploratory case study to examine the instructional practices of elementary content teachers of ELLs and how those practices are perceived by the teachers to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance. I collected data using semi-structured interviews and the review and analysis of lesson plans from a sample of nine elementary content teachers. The interviews were scheduled for 1 hour and, each interview was recorded using FreeConferenceCall.com as an audio recording system. All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed. Following the transcription of the interviews, participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy. Once I read the transcripts, I then re-read them to begin coding the interviews

for potential themes. I developed codes that addressed the research questions and conceptual framework. The findings provided an understanding of participants' perceptions of working with ELLs and how they implemented instructional practices in mainstream classes. The policy recommendation that evolved from the research study presents my endorsements to improve the instructional practices, which could lead to the academic enhancement efforts for ELLs.

Findings

The results of this study consist of five major themes: (a) cooperative learning strategies, (b) varied instructional strategies, (c) collaboration with ESOL teachers, (d) language barriers, and (e) a welcoming learning environment. For each theme, a more in-depth discussion is provided below.

Theme 1: Cooperative learning strategies. Implementing cooperative learning strategies to promote English language acquisition among ELLs refers to the use of strategies that are important instructional practices that positively affect ELL learning. Participants involved in the interviews reported that cooperative learning methods allowed ELLs with low English proficiency to feel more confident and engaged in mainstream classrooms. Additionally, pairing students with varying levels of proficiency, participants replied, allow students to mastery subjects because students learn best from one another.

Theme 2: Varied instructional strategies. In reference to teachers' use of varied instructional strategies, ELLs learn best when instructional practices meet their individual needs. Interviewed participants reported that varied instructional practices

provided the proper support to enhance student performance. Participants stated that ELLs need to have varied instructional strategies that included small groups and multimodal approaches such as graphic organizers, visuals, music, and gestures, as well as building on students' cultural competence to help make content understandable for ELLs. Furthermore, ELLs can overcome challenges when teachers employ varied instructional methods that address culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

Theme 3: Collaboration with ESOL teachers. Collaboration with ESOL teachers discusses a method for content teachers to engage with their ELLs effectively. However, many of the content teachers complained that pulling ELLs from their classrooms can be extremely disruptive. Eight out of the nine participants affirmed that teaching modifications to provide ELLs with the same learning opportunities as their non-ELL students included sharing teaching strategies with ESOL teachers. One of the participants stated her ELLs are coming to her classroom better prepared to learn because of her collaborating with the ESOL teacher.

Theme 4: Language barriers. Emphasis on parental communication as one of the keys to improving academic performance referred to ways that support parental engagement between teachers and parents. Participants interviewed stated that because of the language barrier, increased efforts were warranted to involve parents in academic pursuits of ELLs. Communicating with parents, commented participants were difficult for them because of the language barrier. Participants also shared that basic English classes could be offered for parents to help bridge the communication gap.

Theme 5: A welcoming learning environment. A welcoming learning environment is the final theme, which referred to how the appropriate classroom atmosphere could increase academic achievement. Participants interviewed stated that the proper environment was established, real learning can take place. Moreover, by building community and relationships, commented one participant, a child learns best when they feel welcome.

Recommendations

The policy recommendation provided is a direct result of the study findings. The policy recommendation aims to increase the districts' stakeholders' understanding of the instructional practices, which can state improvement of instructional strategies, which can lead to the academic enhancement efforts for ELLs. The findings reflected in the literature review indicate there are a variety of barriers that hinder the instructional practices of elementary content teachers and ELL academic performance. Thus, I present solutions to the obstacles that hinder the instructional practices of elementary content teachers and their ability to enhance ELL student performance. The policy recommendation is based on the five major themes that emerged from the study.

Recommendation 1: Build time into the school year for district-level communication and collaboration. Data collected for this policy recommendation indicates that eight of the nine participants found value collaborating with ESOL teachers to assist ELLs who are struggling in mainstream classes. However, most participants commented that one of the challenges they faced with ELLs in the classroom was the additional class management needed to adjust to ESOL teachers pulling ELLs in and out

of their classrooms. It is recommended that district administration provide one full in-service day, per quarter, to allow elementary content and ESOL teachers to communicate, collaborate, and learn from one another in efforts to improve ELL learning.

Evidence. Communication and collaboration among elementary content and ESOL teachers have been validated as a strategy to promote ELL academic performance. Mundschenk and Fuchs (2016) recommended teacher collaboration to improve ELL academic success. Prelli (2016) also recommended teacher collaboration because it provides additional opportunities for teachers to learn appropriate practices applicable to their students. Building relationships through collaboration suggested Jao and McDougall (2016) can enhance teacher knowledge by improving effective teaching practices. Collaborative activities, as sanctioned by Johnston and Tsai (2018), also produced co-planning for struggling ELL students. Mandel and Eiserman (2015) found that ESOL and classroom teachers can learn and grow in their teaching practices together. As a result, students are coming into mainstream classrooms better prepared to learn. The authors summarized that teacher collaboration was especially beneficial in science and social studies where it is more content-specific vocabulary that can be more challenging. Kirchhoff (2015) recommended that students can achieve greater success when elementary content teachers and ESOL teachers utilize collaboration by sharing ideas and resources. Collaborative teaching, recommended DuFour et al. (2016) allow teachers to share experiences they have in the classroom and become the crux of a thriving learning community. These activities provide the elementary content and the

ESL teacher opportunities to combine their teaching methods. Team members become stronger by sharing ideas to maximize student learning.

Recommendation 2: Employing strategies to increase parental involvement.

One of the biggest challenges identified by participants was to recognize opportunities to overcome the language barrier between parents and teachers and increase parental involvement. It is recommended that teachers provide bilingual written documentation to parents of ELLs to improve communication between themselves, students, and parents.

Evidence. A positive correlation has been linked between ELL parental involvement and ELL students' higher test scores, increased motivation, and higher reading achievement (Calarco, 2016; Parsons & Shim, 2019). To enhance student performance, Niehaus et al. (2017) endorsed finding ways to increase parental involvement. Parents of low performing students may feel uncomfortable in school settings. According to Case (2016), this discomfort is because of the cultural communication barriers that exist between parents and teachers. Therefore, it is helpful to employ activities that encourage parents to engage in events that promote positive learning practices with their children (Hindin et al. 2017). Vera et al. (2017) sampled 329 parents of ELLs and found that perceived language barriers were a significant predictor of decreased parental involvement. The investigation determined the reasons why parents might not be involved, factors that promote engagement, and parents' educational ambitions for their children. Rossetti et al. (2018) also advised increased communication between teachers and parents of ELL to improve students' attendance, behavior and

academic achievement. Supporting parental engagement and breaking down language and communication barriers between home and school are recommendations for stakeholders to enhance ELLs' student performance. Parental support allows children to develop literacy skills before children enter school for the first time. Parental involvement in reading stated Carroll (2017) enables children to become familiar with the reading process, which in turn supports their children's literacy development at home. Teachers who provide bilingual written documentation to parents of ELLs can improve communication between themselves, students, and parents (Samalot-Rivera et al. 2018). Improved communication may compel parents to become more engaged in their child's learning process.

Recommendation 3: Creating a diversity training program. Participants of the study voiced the benefits of creating a stress-free learning environment for ELLs to optimize learning. It is recommended that a diversity training program will be completed on an annual basis by elementary content teachers for the purpose of providing cultural competency to better prepare elementary content teachers to aide in the success of all students, especially ELLs.

Evidence. My third recommendation based on the findings of this study is to implement a diversity training program to create a stress-free and welcome learning environment for ELLs. Completing a diversity training program, according to Schwartz (2019), will allow teachers to better communicate with students and parents of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Practical diversity education courses provide participants an opportunity to look at their own cultural bias as it relates to their

ethnically diverse classrooms (Cardona-Molto et al. 2018). The purpose of the training would be to create a stress-free and welcoming learning environment through the integration of culturally competent course content into elementary content teachers' instructional practices (Cardona-Molto et al., 2018; Parsons & Shim, 2019). Diversity training workshops would be aligned with the districts' strategic goal to increase student performance for all students, notably underperforming ELLs.

Conclusion

Educational professionals within the target district have expressed feedback regarding the instructional practices of elementary content teachers with an emphasis on ELLs' student performance. The policy recommendations in this section were constructed through the lens of the study's conceptual framework, culturally relevant pedagogy. That data collected indicated that participants had challenges related to collaborating with ESOL teachers and language barriers, as perceived by the nine participants. The above study findings will be addressed through the policy recommendation that calls for building time into the school year for district-level communication and collaboration, employing strategies to increase parental involvement, and creating a diversity training program. If district stakeholders adapt the implementation of the policy recommendations, this process stands to benefit ELLs at district elementary schools with a strategy to improve instructional practices of elementary content teachers.

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Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire

Interview Protocol
Teacher Perceptions of the Cultural Relevance of ELL Instruction
C. Wesley Owens

Participant #1 _____

Year of Service _____

Opening Statement: First of all, I would like to thank you for your time and cooperation to help me with my research study. Thank you for signing the consent form. A gentle reminder that I will be recording the entire interview. With your permission, may I please start the recording? I like to know what instructional practices you use to support ELL learning. I would also like to know what practices, from your perspective are perceived to connect with improved ELL academic performance? Through this interview, I would like to gain a deeper understanding of your instructional practices.

1. So, to begin this process, can you please tell me how many ELLs are in your classroom?

Motivational Influences: administrative practices where they implement safe places where students feel safe to interact	2. What are your perspectives about ensuring the academic success of ELLs in your classroom?
Cognitive learning: differences that define the gap in acquiring superior learning opportunities between the subgroups and their counterparts	3. Describe your experiences teaching general content classes to ELLs?
Selection processes: students excel in challenging tasks when those tasks do not correspond with students' inherent ability but instead correspond to the students' acquired skills	4. Do you face any challenges in your classroom because of having ELLs in your class?
Affective influences: administrative practices that influence student choices and improve their self-efficacy	5. Describe your perceptions of the optimal learning environment for ELLs?
Cognitive learning	6. What specific instructional practices do you

	use to teach ELLs in your classroom? Can you provide some examples?
Selection Process	7. Please share some modifications you have made in your teaching in order to provide ELLs with the same learning opportunities as your non-ELL students?
Motivational Influences	8. Are there quality instructional resources available for you to use with ELLs to meet their literacy needs? If so, please explain?
Selection Process	9. What practices and programs are in place to assist ELLs that are struggling in mainstream classes?
Affective Influences	10. What obstacles, if any, do you think content teachers face teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms?
	11. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that relate to the topic concerning instructional practices that are linked to improve the academic performance of ELLs?

Appendix C: Research Questions Coding Progression

	RQ1: What instructional practices do elementary content teachers say they use to support ELL learning?	RQ2: What practices are perceived to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance?
A Priori Codes (Interviews)	Academic Success	Academic Success Cultural Competence.
A Priori Codes (Lesson Plans)	Academic Success	
Open Codes (Interviews)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anchor Charts • Kagan leaning structures • Guided reading • Hands on • Visual learning • Sheltered instruction techniques • Small group learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating with ESOL teachers • Lack of professional training • Overcoming parental language barriers • Kinesthetic learning activities
Open Codes (Lesson Plans)	• Teachers' use of varied instructional strategies to improve student performance.	

Axial Codes (Interviews)	<p>1) Cooperative learning strategies.</p> <p>2) Varied instructional strategies.</p>	<p>1) Collaboration with ESOL teachers.</p> <p>2) Language barriers.</p> <p>3) A welcoming learning environment.</p>
Axial Codes (Lesson Plans)	<p>1) Varied instructional strategies.</p>	
Policy Recommendations		<p>1) District-level communication and collaboration.</p> <p>2) Employing strategies to increase parental engagement.</p> <p>3) Diversity Training Program.</p>

Appendix D: Lesson Plan Analysis of Activities and Varied Instruction

Strategy/Activity	Participant Number
Small group instruction	5
Visual learning	1, 2, 4, 7, 9
Cooperative learning	7
Phonics worksheets	4, 5
Academic success	None
Culturally competence	None

Appendix E: Interview Questions Aligned to Research Questions

Interview Questions	Research Questions
<p>1. Describe your experiences teaching general content classes to ELLs?</p> <p>2. Do you face any challenges in your classroom because of having ELLs in your class?</p> <p>3. What specific instructional practices do you use to teach ELLs in your classroom? Can you provide some examples?</p> <p>4. Please share some modifications you have made in your teaching in order to provide ELLs with the same learning opportunities as your non-ELL students?</p> <p>5. Are there quality instructional resources available for you to use with ELLs to meet their literacy needs: If so, please explain?</p>	<p>Research Question 1:</p> <p>What instructional practices do elementary content teachers say they use to support ELL learning?</p>

<p>6. What are your perspectives about ensuring the academic success of ELLs in your classroom?</p> <p>7. Describe your perceptions of the optimal learning environment for ELLs?</p> <p>8. What practices and programs are in place to assist ELLs that are struggling in mainstream classes?</p> <p>9. What obstacles, if any, do you think content teachers face teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms?</p> <p>10. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that relate to the topic concerning instructional practices that are linked to improve the academic performance of ELLs?</p>	<p>Research Question 2:</p> <p>What practices are perceived to be aligned with improved ELL academic performance?</p>
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